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PLUCK AND LUCK

THREE YOUNG GUARDSMEN;
OR, THE CHOSEN CHAMPIONS OF THE QUEEN.

By ALLAN ARNOLD.



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PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure.

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THREE YOUNG GUARDSMEN

OR,

The Chosen Champions of the Queen

By ALLAN ARNOLD

CHAPTER I.

THE FAIR QUEEN.

In the darkest days of the American Revolution three commissioners were sent to France to claim aid and recognition from the government of that country.

As is well known, the famous Benjamin Franklin was one of those agents.

France was almost impoverished at the time, and Americans were very coldly received at first, when the fair queen took up the cause of liberty, to the great disgust of the English.

When the important battle of Saratoga was fought and won by the Americans no one in France rejoiced more than the beautiful Marie Antoinette, and she it was who hastened on the treaty between France and America.

Soon after that treaty was made England declared war against France.

Then France gave substantial aid to the struggling patriots of America, and the noble Lafayette and his gallant companions sailed across the ocean.

If Americans honor Lafayette they should venerate the memory of that fair queen of France.

While she had many enemies of her husband's nation to contend against, she brought down on her head the enmity of the secret English agents in France for her advocacy of the cause of freedom in this land.

The charming Marie Antoinette was a princess of Austria before she wedded the weak-minded and kind-hearted king known as Louis the Sixteenth of France.

On arriving, as a young wife, at the gay French court, all the brightest and bravest men of the age bowed to her beauty, to her wit, and to that charm of manners which none of the ladies in Paris could equal.

The charming queen made friends in plenty among the gay French nobles and officers; but alas! she made enemies also,

and on account of the very qualities that should endear her to noble souls.

The proud beauties of the court were envious of the queen's matchless beauty, and they formed several plots against her.

She thwarted avaricious ministers, and they in turn conspired against her.

Her advocacy of American liberty caused the secret English agents in Paris to work for her destruction, and they spared no means or efforts in working their designs.

Base conspiracies were the order of the day.

Plots were formed week after week.

And scandalous tongues were never at rest in defaming the fair name of the noble queen.

Such was the position of the charming Marie Antoinette at the time when all France was excited over the war with England.

How did the fair queen contend against her numerous enemies?

By pretending not to notice their acts and words as a general rule, though now and again she was compelled to form counterplots, and to take strong measures for crushing her foes.

The good lady had a weary and anxious life of it at best, as she was watched and spied on at every turn, and her most innocent actions were distorted into secret movements for evil purposes, while her lightest words were considered as having a double meaning.

Yet she struggled on bravely, fighting the battle of royal life like a true heroine, and never flinching when she was compelled to risk her fair name, and even her life, for a good purpose or to serve a faithful friend.

And faithful friends she had, indeed, as this tragic narrative will show.

It was early in the evening, and the citizens were busy in discussing the great war which was just proclaimed.

An old man with a grizzly gray beard strutted along one of

the secluded streets, and by his side was a woman in very plain garments whose face was covered with a heavy veil.

The old man was dressed in very plain garments also, but he wore a large loose cloak that gave him a martial appearance.

Under that cloak was a short sword, a dagger and a pair of pistols, together with a small casket which he carried under his left arm.

On reaching a certain square the old man hired a cab and they both entered it.

The driver received his directions, the windows were closed, and the vehicle rolled away, driving toward one of the principal gates leading out of the city.

Each of the passengers looked eagerly back as the cab rolled along, the veiled woman sighing as if in alarm.

"Oh, Hans," she muttered aloud, speaking in German, "do you think we are safe from detection now?"

"I don't think we are pursued, dear mistress," was the confident reply.

"But if we are, and there is danger, you will obey my instructions, good Hans?"

"To the letter, dear lady, though it will pain me to desert you."

"Fear not for me, as it is not my life the wretches seek, and fortune will always throw brave champions in my way. We are nearing the gate now, and show your order."

The cab was stopped at the gate; but it was allowed to proceed on, the old man showing an order signed by the chief of police.

That veiled woman was Marie Antoinette, the persecuted Queen of France, and her old companion was Hans Schobert, and Austrian veteran, who was still serving his former princess.

The old veteran was well disguised, and so was the fair queen.

The cab rolled on for several miles, passing through Versailles, where the royal palace was then located; and it stopped before a small tavern at the edge of a dense forest.

Giving some whispered orders to the driver, who was one of the queen's followers disguised for the occasion, the old soldier led the lady into the public room of the tavern.

He then called for some simple refreshments, the queen gazing around the room from under the dark veil.

Only one customer appeared in the public room, and he was a young man of rather shabby appearance, as far as his clothes were concerned.

"That is not one of my friends," whispered the queen to her old companion, still speaking in the German tongue.

The old soldier cast a careless glance at the youth, who was refreshing himself with plain bread and cheap wine.

"No," he answered, "as he does not wear the tassel or give the sign. Some poor student making his way to the city."

"Or seeking to be a soldier of fortune, perhaps," remarked the queen. "He wears a sword, and he has a fearless eye."

"While I will swear that his pockets are almost empty, madam. Our friends should be here soon."

"It is not time yet, as nine was the hour appointed. That youth is hungry and travel-stained, and his face tells of mental care or sorrow."

The fair queen had the thick veil so arranged that she could peer out without displaying her own brilliant eyes, and she kept watching the young stranger while she partook of the plain refreshments placed before her.

The youth did not appear to heed the glances cast at him, but he heard and understood every word uttered.

"That lady has a sweet tongue," he said to himself, "although she does speak in the guttural German. One of the attendants on the foreign queen, I suppose; and she is out here disguised on some court intrigue."

The sound of galloping horses could then be heard along the road; and the old soldier sprang to the window.

"How many?" inquired the lady, moving after the old man.

"Five."

"And they are coming from Versailles."

"Yes, and I fear they are enemies."

"Then disappear at once."

"But, dear madam, I——"

"Obey me, Hans, or all is lost. Heaven will protect me."

The old soldier bowed and retreated through the back door, while the brave queen seated herself at the table and enjoyed the plain refreshments again.

The young stranger at the table noted the words and movements of the mysterious pair.

"Am I in for an adventure so soon," he muttered, as the five horsemen drew up before the tavern, some of them calling loudly on the stable boys to see to their horses.

Then into the apartment swaggered the five riders, each wearing a dark mask that completely covered his face.

All the riders were arrayed in plain, dark garments, they wore soft hats pulled down over the masks, and they carried swords, such as were used by the gentlemen of that period.

Calling for wine, in hoarse tones, the leader of the party approached the disguised queen and stared at her in a rude manner, making a mocking bow as well.

"Madam," he said, "why hide your fair face under that veil?"

"Why do you hide your ugly countenance under a mask?" was the sharp retort, the queen speaking in assumed tones.

"How can you imagine, fair creature, that mine is an ugly countenance?"

"It must be, when the owner thus insults an unprotected female."

All the other masked riders laughed heartily at the rebuff, and the leader stamped his foot with mortification.

"May the dogs devour me," he cried, "if I don't get a look at your pert countenance, dame, and I will venture to salute it, if you are young and fair. Please raise your veil."

"I will not raise my veil, you churl, and don't be a brute."

The queen arose and drew back, and the masked leader darted forward and attempted to grab at the veil when he received a rude cuff in the face from the brave woman.

"Coward," she cried, "to dare molest a helpless woman. Are you Frenchmen, to stand there like apes, while such a clown assails an unprotected female?"

The rude rascal staggered back on receiving the sharp blow, but he soon darted forward again as if to seize the lady.

The others responded to her appeal with jeers only; and she ran away from her tormentor and took refuge behind the table where the young stranger was seated.

That solemn-faced youth then sprang up from the seat and confronted the masked leader to hurl him back with some force.

"Shame on you," cried the youth. "You must be a vile ruffian, to thus assail one of the gentler sex, and I will defend her."

The man thus rebuked stared at the youth for an instant, a pair of wicked eyes glaring out from under the mask.

Then a mocking laugh burst from him, and he drew his sword, crying:

"Schoolboy, draw and defend yourself, as I will give you a lesson you never learned before, and that is how to die."

The youth did draw his sword as if eager for the fray, and he placed himself in a graceful position as he quietly responded:

"Come on, brute, and the schoolboy may teach the bully a lesson."

The masked leader chuckled as he advanced on the youth with his sword extended, and he merrily cried:

"I will satisfy you all, comrades, and this child will live with my marks on him, as it was not a blow he gave me."

"Then count this a blow, bully!" cried the young stranger.

And then, with a sudden movement, the youth turned aside the weapon of the masked leader, when he closed with him and struck him a rough blow in the face with his left hand.

On the next instant the youth was back in his former position, with his guard up and his eyes flashing defiance, as he continued:

"Don't spare me now, ruffian, or I will leave my mark on you."

Cries of rage and astonishment burst from the other masked men, and the queen clapped her hands impulsively, as if delighted at the prompt action of her unknown champion.

"In truth," she cried, "my young friend can strike a good blow."

The masked leader appeared to be dazed by the rough blow he had received, and he drew back a few steps more after he had staggered under it.

The others then rushed on the youth together, one of them crying:

"Death to the young beggar!"

"Back, back, comrades," cried the discomfited leader, recovering himself, "and I will deal with the young dog. May perdition take me, if his audacity didn't astound me for the moment."

"And my blow knocked some the bullying spirit out of you," retorted the fearless young stranger, who did not shrink from the numbers confronting him. "Now, then, I am ready for that lesson."

While the youth was speaking an old clock in the corner struck the hour.

"Oh, would that my gallant young friends were here," muttered the queen.

As if prompt to the second, two horsemen dashed up to the door of the tavern, when they were greeted by the clashing of swords from within.

Springing from their horses, the two riders drew their swords and dashed into the tavern, one of them crying in merry tones:

"Is this in play or in earnest? Hallo! Why so many masks?"

The queen uttered an exclamation to herself, as she saw the two riders, and she slipped over to them and whispered:

"Stand by the young stranger without the mask, as he is acting as my champion."

"To the death, dear lady!" responded the rider with the merry voice. "Will we in and stop the combat now?"

"No, no! He appears to be a match for the masked ruffian, but the others will assail him if he conquers."

"Then there will be sword-play in plenty, my lady! Ha! that is a gallant youth, and he will conquer."

The swordsmen were at it in full swing, the masked man setting on the young stranger with intense skill and fury, and vowing vengeance at every blow and lunge offered.

The pale-faced youth wore a confident smile as he parried the attacks without giving way an inch, and he only replied to the threats by quietly saying:

"Less boasting, and on with the lesson. My eye is safe yet."

Enraged though he was, the masked bully soon realized that he had a superior swordsman to deal with, and one who had muscles of steel as well.

The other masked men were so deeply interested in the combat, as well as amazed at the resistance offered to their leader, that they scarcely noticed the entrance of the two strangers.

Those masked men knew that their leader was accounted one of the best swordsmen in France, and they could not

comprehend how a mere lad could resist his furious onslaught even a few moments.

Their astonishment increased as they beheld the youth assuming the aggressive.

Then back fell the masked leader, as he made frantic efforts to ward off the lightning-like thrusts sent at him, when his weapon flew from his grasp, and he staggered back with his hand to his left eye, groaning:

"Perdition! The young dog has ruined my eye. At him, comrades, and avenge me."

The tavern resounded with yells of rage as the four masked men rushed at the gallant youth, who placed his back to the wall as he faced his foes.

"Vile cowards!" cried a merry voice, "and you must be bandits. Brave lad, we will strike with you."

And the two strangers dashed through the masked men, to range themselves one at each side of the pale-faced stranger.

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG STRANGER.

The two horsemen thus taking sides with the young stranger were arrayed as travelers, and they were both under twenty years of age.

One of them, and the one with the merry voice, was a tall, supple youth, with an open, manly face.

The other was under the average height for his age, and he was stout and inclined to flesh, but he was as active as an acrobat in all his movements.

They both wore loose cloaks, high boots, and felt hats with tassels at the side.

In springing forward to the rescue of the young stranger, the youths flung back their cloaks, thus displaying a brace of pistols in each of their belts.

The four assailants hesitated and drew back a little when thus confronted, when their wounded leader picked up his sword and cried:

"Those are the young dogs we are after. At them ere they can use their pistols. I will take the schoolboy again."

"On my oath," cried the tall young traveler with the merry voice, "but the schoolboy gave you one good dose. At him again, youngster, and we will keep the other in play. Forward, brave comrade of mine."

The three youths dashed forward together as if moved by one impulse, and the pale-faced student selected his former opponent again.

The queen held back near the door as her friends rushed on the masked men, and she clasped her hands as she muttered:

"What dauntless youths! They would face an army for my sake."

The tall traveler struck at the masked man in front of him, and the fellow fell at the second blow, crying:

"I am done for."

His assailant then turned quickly at another opponent, as he merrily cried:

"Slash away, good comrade, and we will make short work of the rascals."

And down went another victim before the sword of the tall traveler.

His little stout friend was almost as active, as he had succeeded in cutting down one opponent, and he was engaged with another.

The young stranger was forcing the leader back to the door, and he aimed to cut the mask from the fellow's face at every slash.

Though suffering intense agony from the prod in the eye, the masked man fought with more judgment than before, and he aimed to get in a fatal thrust, as he hissed forth:

"Beggary dog, I will have your life."

"I must unmask you and then touch the other eye," quietly responded the smiling young stranger, "yet I do not wish to blind you."

"Finish him if you can," cried the tall traveler, "as other foes ride this way."

"Then here goes!" cried the young stranger, as he made a pass at his opponent.

Then out of the door reeled the leader of the masked men, to fall with his hand on his right breast, as he groaned:

"The fiend has deserted me to be thus slain by a nameless youth. Help, friends!"

The queen's gallant friends had then conquered their four opponents, all of whom were groaning on the floor.

Some twenty horsemen were dashing toward the tavern at full speed.

"This way with us, brave youth!" said the queen, as she caught the young stranger by the arm and drew him toward the back door with her friends at each side of her.

The landlord and his wife had retreated into a side hall while the melee was going on.

All the masked men were groaning with agony and calling for help as the queen and her young friends retreated to the back door, while up to the front of the tavern dashed the horsemen.

The queen and her friends were soon out in a small garden at the back of the tavern, and the good lady became fearfully excited when she heard loud cries in front.

"To the forest," she said. "Come with us, brave youth, or you will be slain."

"Where is Hans, good madam?" inquired the tall traveler, as they all ran along together.

"He escaped, by my order, as those masked men rode up to the tavern."

"Then, in mercy, dear lady, why didn't you escape with him?"

"You forget that I had an appointment with you at nine."

"That is true, but it is fearful to think that you should risk your precious life. Stoop as we dash along behind the hedge. The dogs are giving chase now."

The fugitives had left the garden, and they were running along at the side of a thick hedge leading to the edge of the forest.

Furious cries and shouts could be heard from the yard of the tavern and the garden, and torches flashed up in the same direction.

"They are tracking our footsteps," remarked the tall, merry youth, "but we will laugh at them when we gain the forest. Oh, dear lady, this fatigue is not fit for you."

"I am not a child, my gallant friend, and I would enjoy the excitement were it given under different auspices, but there is so much at stake now."

"Yes, yes, dear lady. And what of the precious casket?"

"Beware, comrade," said the stout youth, speaking for the first time, as he cast a glance at the young stranger.

"I will confide in this brave youth," said the queen, as they entered the forest, "as he has proved a gallant champion."

"Thanks, lady, whoever you may be," quietly responded the stranger.

"In good faith, so I will," responded the tall traveler, "as no traitor or spy ever struck so fairly and so well. Who are you, friend?"

"I am a stranger in France."

"But you are not German or English, as you speak French so well?"

"No, I come from America, and my people were French Huguenots."

"Oh, that's where the people are fighting against the rascally English. Why, I should think a brave youth like you would remain at home to strike a good blow at the enemy."

The young stranger sighed deeply, and answered in sad tones:

"Would that I could, sir, but cruel fate drove me from the land of my birth."

"Monsieur Fallon," said the queen, "seek not to probe the secrets of the gallant youth who has served me so well at the great risk of his own life."

"In truth, lady, I would cut my tongue out first, you may swear. I only wanted to know the lad, so that we may serve him hereafter, if a chance offered."

"My history is easily told," responded the young stranger, "and I only wish to conceal my real name at present, for a good purpose. I call myself Tornay; I was banished from New York—or rather I fled—being accused of a crime I did not commit."

"Why didn't you remain to face it out then?" inquired the youth called Fallon.

"Because the real culprit, as I believe, fled here to France; and I must seek him and expose him ere I can face my friends and kindred again."

The queen grasped the hand of the young stranger and pressed it warmly.

"Brave youth," she said, in pathetic tones, "I am the Queen of France, and I firmly believe that you never committed a foul crime. I noted your countenance well, and I feel that honor and truth govern your actions only."

As all signs of pursuit had ceased, the little party drew up inside the forest.

The youth calling himself Tornay dropped on one knee and seized the queen's hand to press it at his lips, and the tears welled up into his eyes as he fervently exclaimed:

"Noble and generous lady, accept the homage and the devotion of a nameless wanderer who would forfeit his life a thousand times over to serve you. More I cannot say."

"On my soul," said the tall youth called Fallon, with a merry chuckle, "but you have said a good deal in short order. My brave father, who was the greatest gallant in the Irish brigade, could not say any more, or his son either, and Clarence Fallon will swear by you hereafter."

"Is that you, dear lady?" inquired a cautious voice, as old Hans put his head out from behind a tree.

"Yes, yes, Hans. What of the casket?"

"It is safe for the present. Is this the youth we saw in the tavern?"

"The same; and he is now my sworn friend. Oh, you should have seen him fight for me."

"And I hope to strike for you again, noble lady," responded young Tornay.

You will have plenty of chances, my boy, if you will be one of us," replied Clarence Fallon; "and what do you say, noble lady?"

"Perhaps the youth has other views," replied the queen.

"I will be proud to serve you, noble lady, if you will take an unknown outcast into your service. I must confess I am almost a beggar, while hunting down my enemy."

"Well, then, good youth, you will serve as one of my guardsmen, and I will aid you in seeking your enemy. I will make you one of my chosen champions hereafter."

"That is if he can pass through the ordeals, good lady," protested young Fallon.

"I know he will, as I suspect whom he defeated to-night."

"But we laid out two each."

"Oh, you jealous young wretch," chided the queen, as she gave the tall youth a playful slap on the cheek. "One moment you praise this youth, and the next instant you object to his chance of serving me. Well, put him to the ordeals, and I'll warrant he'll not fail."

"As you will, dear lady. Now for the journey to the frontier."

"Child, you forget where your horses are," reminded the queen. "Besides, I think it best to delay the journey now."

"As to the horses, noble lady, trust my comrade and I in securing them."

"But my enemies are aroused now, reckless boy, and you will have to cut your way through them if you proceed."

"We'll do it, lady, or we'll veer around a little if necessary; but let it be as you command."

The queen bent her head in reflection for some moments, when she raised her glowing eyes, and said:

"Yes, I will trust to the valor and wisdom of my young champions. Where is the precious casket, good Schobert?"

"It is buried at the foot of a large oak, a short distance back, lady."

"Then we will dig it up again, and my young guardsmen will away with it. I dread evil while it is in France."

The old German led the way back to the place where he had hidden the casket, the others following close after him.

"And so, young sir," said the queen to the young stranger, "you come from the land where brave Washington is struggling to form a new nation?"

"I do, noble lady; and I predict that he will succeed with the splendid aid now given by your noble efforts."

"Thunder and blitzen!" cried the old German, as he stood under the oak tree and groaned aloud, "some thief has stolen the casket! Oh, I will kill myself at once!"

CHAPTER III.

THE LOST CASKET.

The old German fell on his knees before the hole where he had deposited the precious casket, and wild and piteous were the groans that escaped from him as he felt the loose earth recently thrown out from the hiding-place.

"Is it really gone?" asked Clarence Fallon, as he bent down over the old German.

"Gone, gone!" moaned the distracted old veteran. "Oh, Monsieur Fallon, run your sword through my miserable heart."

"I'll run it through the treacherous thief. Away in that direction, comrade, and I'll take this path."

The silent young guardsman only needed the hint, and he darted away in the direction indicated by his companion.

Clarence Fallon darted away in the other direction, saying:

"We'll catch the thief, dear lady. Stranger, remain here on guard."

The queen bent her head on her breast and pressed her hands to her temples like one stupefied.

"Noble lady," said the young American, "do not be so depressed, as your brave followers will recover the casket. The thief cannot be far away."

"That's so, that's so," cried the old German, springing up and drawing his sword; "as it is but a few minutes since I left this spot to seek you, noble lady, I will away to find the wretch and to slay him."

And the old soldier ran away in another direction.

The queen leaned against the tree and sighed deeply with her head still bent.

"Some spy must have been watching us," she moaned.

"Noble lady," responded the young stranger, "it goes to my heart to see you in such agony, and how can I serve you?"

"Recover the lost casket and I will bless you forever."

The young man drew forth a flint and steel to strike a light to a small taper, when he knelt on the ground and examined the soft earth around the tree.

He soon struck on the trail of bare footprints, which were very small and well formed, and he muttered aloud:

"It is a woman who is the thief. This way, noble lady."

"Address me as madam at present, good youth. What have you discovered?"

"Small footprints leading back towards the tavern, madam. They run along this path to the left. I believe the thief followed the old gentleman from the tavern, and that the culprit is a woman or girl."

"Oh, how clever you are. What is to be done now?"

"If your friends would return to guard you here, I will hasten to the tavern to recover the casket."

The queen drew forth a small silver whistle and sent forth a shrill, peculiar call.

They were then standing near the edge of the forest, looking out at the tavern.

Clarence Fallon was the first to dash in on hearing the call.

"Have you found the casket, lady?" he asked.

"No, but we are on the track of the thief."

Tornay then hastened to relate about his discovery, and he continued:

"I now propose to steal back to the tavern and recover the casket, while you will remain here with the noble lady."

The other young guardsmen and the old German had also returned at the queen's call, and they noted the discovery made by the American.

Old Hans indulged in strong German imprecations as he listened.

"Yes," he said, "I saw a young girl in the yard as I stole out the back way by your order to conceal the precious casket, madame."

"She must have followed you," said the queen, "and her father, who is the landlord of the tavern must be in the plot against me."

The youth calling himself Tornay was listening and pondering deeply, still keeping his eyes fixed on the tavern.

"If you will permit me to suggest," he remarked, in his modest way, "I think that one at a time can do better than three. While I am young I saw service in Indian, spying and trailing in my own country. That is why I would try alone."

"And I insist," protested young Fallon, "with the queen's approval, in striking a blow for the recovery of the casket."

"Then go together and act in harmony," sighed the distressed lady, "and the others will remain here to guard me. Recover the casket and I will be your faithful friend forever."

The youths bowed and stole from the trees together, the queen remarking:

"A strange youth that, but he is clever and brave, and I believe he will be true to me."

The young men stole along behind the hedge, and they noticed that all was quiet at the tavern, while no riders appeared on the road.

Clarence Fallon would not be second to any one in a rushing charge or a desperate fight of any kind, yet he instinctively felt that the stranger was his superior in some points.

On reaching the back of the garden, the young American proposed that they should skirt around so as to approach the house on the side instead of by the rear.

"They may be on the watch for us by the rear," he remarked, "and try to ambush us in the garden."

"Very true," returned Clarence; "and I do not understand their being so quiet in there, when so many of their fellows were wounded or slain."

"They are striving to entrap us. Stoop lower and steal along here."

The thick high hedge ran along to the side of the tavern, and the youths held their breaths as they moved along with their grasped swords under their cloaks.

All was dark and silent in the lower part of the building, but lights appeared on the upper floor in front.

On peering cautiously over the hedge, young Tornay could

see over twenty horses drawn up in front, with some of the riders holding the steeds.

No living soul could be seen in the orchard or in the back yard.

Pointing to one of the side windows, young Tornay proposed to climb up if the other would remain behind the hedge.

"I believe," whispered the young American, "that the girl has the casket yet."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because the riders would either move on or return if their leader had secured it."

"You are wise, and I believe you are right. Up with you and look for the girl."

The young American showed that he was as active as he was cautious in gaining the window, to which he ascended by the slender creeping vines running along the side of the house.

A small lamp was burning inside the room at the window of which he peered in, when he saw a young girl cautiously securing the door on the inside.

The girl was barefooted, but she was young and fair to look upon, while a merry, roguish light gleamed from out her dark eyes.

Having secured the door, the girl stole back to bed, drew a casket from under the tick, and opened the lid near the lamp.

A subdued exclamation of delight then escaped from her, as she beheld the dazzling gems inside.

The girl was so absorbed in gazing at the sparkling treasure that she did not notice the silent youth as he stole in at the window.

"Can I have confidence in mother?" the girl mused aloud. "No! She would want most of the treasure herself. Father would take it all. Oh, who will I make a confidant of?"

"Of me," answered a mild voice, as the startled girl found a hand clasping her mouth. "Don't cry out, my pretty thief, or you will be exposed."

The thievish girl struggled fiercely, but young Tornay held her arms and pressed a hand to her mouth.

"It is death if you are discovered with that casket," he continued. "Will you be silent if I withdraw my hand?"

The girl nodded her head and ceased to struggle with her arms.

Tornay withdrew his hands, seized the casket and placed it under his cloak, and then presented his sword at the girl.

"Thief," he threatened, in quiet tones, "if you raise an alarm I will slay you. I will take the casket to its owner."

The girl glared at the youth with tigerish eyes.

"You stole them first," she retorted. "I am so poor and miserable that I was tempted when I saw the old knave burying the casket. Oh, youth, you are poor also. Share with me, and there will be enough to make us both rich."

Tornay smiled at the proposal, and moved back toward the window.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Maria. Oh, do share with me, as I am so miserable here, where they abuse and starve me, and I want to run away and live in Paris."

And the pleading girl flung herself on her knees to moan in piteous tones.

A loud knock was heard on the door, and a harsh voice cried:

"Maria, Maria, you lazy girl, how dare you retire and the house full of customers! Open at once, or I'll beat you to death."

The young American slipped out of the window, and motioned to the girl to follow him.

Maria obeyed, while the woman outside raved and flung herself against the door.

The girl was on the ground almost as soon as the youth,

when a fierce-looking woman appeared at the window above, yelling:

"Thieves—robbers! Out with you down there, as some wretches are bearing away my Maria!"

The young American darted over the hedge, followed by the anxious girl, while out from the garden and from the back of the tavern sprang over a dozen men with swords flashing.

Young Tornay handed the precious casket to Clarence Fallon.

"Away with you to the queen," he whispered, "and I will keep back our enemies."

"There they are behind the hedge!" yelled the fierce landlady. "Over after the robbers and slay them. Come back, Maria."

The young guardsman darted away along the side of the hedge, and the stranger and the girl flew along after him.

Then out over the hedge sprang the swordsmen, one of them yelling:

"Riders in front, give chase. Away after the rascals. Fire on them."

"My former opponent," muttered Tornay, as he recognized the voice. "I thought I had settled him in the last bout."

The girl appeared to be more anxious to escape from her home than the youth, as she soon darted ahead of him, while several pistol shots lent wings to all the fugitives.

Along the road dashed several of the horsemen, to turn in towards the hedge as they heard the shouts of the swordsmen on foot.

The agitated queen was standing near the edge of the forest with her two friends as young Fallon dashed toward her.

"Fly, madam," he said, "and I have the casket safe."

"Then fly with it," gasped the queen, "as I am too exhausted to run."

"But I cannot desert you, madam."

"Obey me. I command. Who are you, girl?"

Maria did not answer, as she was darting away through the trees after Clarence Fallon.

Then into the path sprang the young American, closely followed by his pursuers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEEN AND HER FOES.

The queen's heart was beating wildly as the young American gained her side.

"Fly, dear madam," said he, "and we will guard your retreat."

Old Hans was then grasping the disguised lady's arm to assist her, and it was fortunate that she had not yet been perceived by her enemies.

The queen and her friends were slowly and silently retreating back through the forest, the brave woman having recovered strength and courage by the delay of her enemies.

"I should know that voice," she whispered to Hans.

The old German did not respond, save by a pressure on the arm.

"Turn to the left here," whispered young Tornay, who retreated with his face to the foes.

Placide kept by the young American's side with sword and pistol ready.

Moving silently to the left out of the path, they glided in among the dense brushwood for several paces, when Tornay whispered to the queen:

"Crouch down here, madam, and the ruffians may not find us."

"A good scheme," responded Hans, in similar tones. "Ah, you have seen service, I know."

The four friends bent down among the bushes, and in along

the path moved the masked men, stealing along like so many robbers pouncing on a victim.

Whispering some advice to his friends to remain as they were, Tornay stole out on the path and moved along after the masked men, but he had not proceeded far when he was suddenly seized around the arms from behind, a harsh voice yelling:

"Back here, back here, gentlemen. I've caught the robber who stole away my Maria."

Though taken by surprise, and feeling the strong arms of the virago on his own, Tornay did not lose his presence of mind for the instant.

Kicking backward and falling suddenly he bore the old woman to the ground and burst away from her.

Back rushed the armed men just as the young American regained his feet with his sword clasped.

The old landlady yelled furiously as she lay on the ground; and the masked men surrounded Tornay.

"Surrender, bandit," cried their leader, "or we will hack you limb from limb."

"To whom do I surrender?" was the quiet rejoinder.

"To an officer of the king."

"There is my answer."

The young American turned suddenly to the right and struck down two of the masked men with as many rapid blows of his sword.

And then, with a shout of defiance that was meant to assure his friends also, he darted into the bushes, taking a course leading away from the queen.

"After him, after him," yelled the masked leader, in furious tones. "Fire at him—cut him down. That is the young fiend who assailed me."

The queen and her companions heard and understood all that had passed on the pathway.

Placide, the young guardsman, did not speak or mutter a word, as his was a silent nature, but he mentally vowed to form a life-long friendship with the gallant young American.

"The brave stranger is leading my enemies in a false chase away from us," remarked the queen, in very subdued tones.

"Choke that woman out there," grunted old Hans, "as the path would be clear now only for her."

"Will I silence the old hag, good lady?" quietly suggested the young guardsman.

"Can you do it without bloodshed?"

"Truly, madam."

"Try it then, as she is evidently in league with my enemies."

The fat young guardsman stole out through the bushes as quietly as a fox, and he was soon close to the virago, who was still swearing vengeance against the unknown abductor of Maria.

"I'll have the bandit burned at the stake," she yelled; "and I'll scald his eyes out! Mercy!"

That was the only exclamation the woman could utter, as Placide seized her from behind, clapping a hand on her mouth as he dragged her in among the bushes.

At a motion from the young guardsman old Hans made quick work in binding the woman's arms and forcing her to the ground.

"Wretch," commenced the queen, in stern but subdued tones, "who is the leader of the masked bandits who stopped at your house to-night?"

"Count Pollo," was the answer.

"Do you know who I am?"

"I do not."

"Whom did Count Pollo seek to-night when he rode to your tavern?" continued the queen.

"Two messengers riding from Paris."

"Do you know why he wished to capture the messengers?"

"No. I only know that they are the slaves of the hated Austrian who rules France, and that they were going to the German frontier on a vile mission for her."

The queen had the thick veil over her fair face, and her friends could not perceive her emotion.

The cries of Tornay's pursuers were then dying away out toward the road.

"They have lost the trail out there," remarked old Hans, "and our young champion will soon be back to us."

Madame Fouchard was glaring at her captors in torn with angry eyes.

The yells outside were suddenly renewed, coming from the direction of the tavern.

"They have struck on him again," excitedly remarked old Hans, as he bent his head to listen, "and I hear steeds coming this way."

"How many?" inquired the young guardsman.

"Only two, I think."

"Then I'll vow it is our friend coming to us with a spare horse."

"Then he is a wonderful youth," said the queen, as she listened eagerly.

The approaching steeds could then be heard drawing near the edge of the wood, and a clear voice was raised, crying:

"Friends, out on the path with you as I ride in, and I have your two steeds."

"Out with you, hag, and be silent," said the young guardsman, dragging Mother Fouchard through the thick bushes. "We are here, brother."

Along the path rode the young American, leading a spare horse.

"Up with the lady on the other steed," he cried, "and you with her, old soldier. Mount behind me, sir, and—Who is that?"

"The young robber who stole my——"

Before the old virago could utter another word, Placide tied a handkerchief around her mouth and flung her into the bushes with her arms still secured.

The old veteran raised the queen to the saddle on the instant and vaulted up behind her, inquiring:

"Which way now, brave youth?"

"Out to the road, as I think the way is clear to Versailles."

"I can never forget your noble acts, sir," said the queen, as they dashed away, Placide riding behind his new comrade.

"And so you went to the tavern for our steeds?" remarked the young guardsman.

"Yes, as I feared the lady could not escape on foot."

"Did you encounter any foes at the tavern?"

"Two only. The others were then coming along the road from Versailles."

"Did they pursue you?"

"Yes. Do you not hear their cries now?"

They could all hear the cries of the pursuers soon after, on horse and on foot, as they dashed in among the thick trees.

The queen and her friend turned into the first path leading out on the highway.

"Is this a good steed, Hans?" the lady asked.

"None better in the stable, lady, than the two selected by your young champions to ride to the frontier."

"Then we will escape the fiends?"

"If we are not opposed on the road; and then we have the braves youth to charge for us."

On reaching the road the young men pushed on ahead, the strong steeds bearing their double burdens with apparent ease.

They had reached a turn of the road when four masked horsemen darted out of the wood ahead of them, one of the riders crying:

"Halt there!"

Two pistol shots from the young riders was the response as they dashed on, and two of the horsemen fell.

"Strike to the left," said Tornay to his young comrade, as they closed with the other two horsemen, who spurred to meet them.

The riders in front thought that they had but a single horseman to deal with at once, the old veteran and the queen being some paces behind, and they opened a way so as to assail their enemy on each side.

"Down with the bandit," yelled one of the masked riders, as he struck at Tornay, the other striking at the same instant.

Four swords then clashed together, and two masked riders rolled on the ground an instant after.

Along dashed old Hans and the queen, the veteran crying:

"Dunder and blitzen, but our foes do suffer bad to-night."

"They will fare worse yet," responded the queen; "and now on to Versailles."

The two powerful steeds dashed on, with a dozen riders thundering on behind them.

It was not more than half-past ten o'clock when the disguised queen entered the palace by a private door.

The two young champions rode into the stable yard on the splendid steeds, and Placide then led his new friend up to his own quarters.

Inquiries were made for Clarence Fallon, when it was discovered that the hot-headed young guardsman had not yet returned to the palace.

Within a quarter of an hour after returning to the palace, the beautiful queen appeared in the grand reception room in a magnificent costume, and one of the first persons she noted there was Count Pollo,

The queen knew that, while the gallant count pretended to be one of her most devoted admirers, he belonged to a secret and powerful clique of her enemies.

After saluting her guests with courtly grace, Marie Antoinette drew one of her most faithful maids of honor aside, and whispered:

"How long has Count Polo been here, Lucille?"

Since before ten o'clock, madame."

"Did he appear agitated?"

"Not in the least. He had just ridden from Paris with the Marquis of Lally and the American ambassador, who came to thank you."

"That old hag at the tavern must have lied to us," said the queen to herself, "but I will investigate further; and Count Pollo will feel my vengeance if he is guilty."

About the hour of midnight, old Hans led the young American and Placide to one of the queen's private reception rooms.

"I trust you have supped well," she said, "as I fear that I have more work for you to-night."

The young men assured the fair queen that they were prepared to work or travel a week in her behalf if necessary, and she continued:

"Monsieur Fallon has not returned with the precious casket, and I fear that some disaster has befallen him. Will you go forth in search of him, my faithful ones, and use your discretion in the affair?"

Young Placide pressed his hand to his breast and bent his knee, as he answered:

"Trust to us, beloved lady."

The young American responded in a similar manner.

In less than ten minutes after the young men were riding toward Paris on the good steeds re-captured at the tavern by the young American.

"You are wise, comrade," said Placide, "to face this way first, as the queen's enemies may be watching us."

CHAPTER V.

YOUNG FALLON'S ADVENTURES.

When young Tornay escaped from the window of the tavern with the casket and the pretty girl, Clarence Fallon was under the impression that the maiden had freely delivered the jewels up to him.

The young guardsman could not see or hear what had passed in the bedroom; and the willing flight of the girl led him to suppose that she was in the full confidence of the young American.

When they reached the edge of the wood, and the queen ordered Clarence to make off with the casket, the hot-headed youth did not notice the girl as she darted after him.

The others paid little heed to the incident in their anxiety regarding the queen.

Now Clarence did not like the task assigned him, as he would be more in his element in defending the fair queen against numerous foes.

Yet he was bound to perform his mission as ordered, and he knew that the casket contained gems of enormous value.

The young guardsman used his legs unsparingly as he dashed on through the forest, with the intention of seeking some empty hut, where he could hide the casket and then return and fight for the queen.

He could not hear the barefooted girl behind him, as Maria darted along like a noiseless shadow, as she kept muttering:

"I will reclaim the precious gems, and I will be a grand lady in Paris. They are stolen, and why should I not rob the thieves?"

Clarence Fallon kept looking on each side of him as he ran along, but he did not once turn his eyes backward.

The young guardsman had proceeded more than a mile in the forest when a tall burly form darted out on the path in front of him, with a gun, upraised, crying:

"Hold up, poacher, and I have caught you at last at your thieving work."

Clarence came to a halt and glared angrily at the big keeper, retorting:

"Out of my path, knave, as I am not a poacher."

"Then why are you prowling in the king's forest, and what is that you hold under your arm?"

"Private property, you fool. Out of my path, or I'll cut you down."

"Ho! ho! and so you will cut Ajax down, robber of good venison. Then at you it is."

And the huge keeper darted at the young guardsman with his gun upraised.

Then the young guardsman became fully enraged, and he cried:

"I have warned you, knave, and take a slash from a good sword."

Avoiding the second blow aimed at him, the young guardsman dealt the huge keeper a slash with the sword on the side of the head, and the man fell in the path, yelling:

"The poacher has slain me. Help—murder!"

"The giant cries too much to be fatally injured," said the young guardsman, as he ran along again, "and I am glad he is not slain. Is that a light I see through the trees?"

Clarence made toward the glimmering light, and he soon reached a substantial hut.

Drawing up outside the window he peered into a comfortable room, muttering:

"Perdition take me, if this must not be the home of the big keeper, and I see no one inside. I will see, however."

The youth went to the door and struck on it with his sword, crying:

"Hello, are you at home?"

Not receiving an answer, he opened the door and walked in.

A bottle of wine, a drinking cup, and a pipe lay on the table, and Clarence poured out a draught for himself, saying:

"Here's to the speedy recovery of Ajax and more sense to him next time."

Having drained the cup, the dashing youth looked into a small bedroom, muttering:

"Ajax must be a bachelor. Where will be a safe place to hide the casket?"

Maria Fouchard was then peering in at the front window, and muttering:

"He is seeking a place to hide the casket. He is a fool, but is very handsome. Perhaps he would fall in love with me, as they say that I have bewitching eyes."

The ambitious girl could not see the youth while he was in the bedroom, in which there was no window, and he remained there several minutes.

Maria was getting impatient, when she heard footsteps approaching the hut, and she stole around to the back of the little building.

"It is Ajax and two of his keepers. They will slay the handsome youth, and the casket will then be mine, yet what a pity," she muttered.

Clarence was searching in the bedroom some time before he discovered what he considered a safe place to hide the precious casket, and he said to himself:

"This will be better than at the foot of a tree, which I may not be able to find again; and who will think of looking for it here?"

Having placed the casket in the hiding-place the reckless youth entered the outer room again to fill another cup of wine, saying:

"Great Ajax, I drink again to your speedy recovery or to a happy death."

"Death to you, robber," yelled a fierce voice at the door, "and down to the lower regions with you!"

The young guardsman dropped the cup and turned to the doorway, when he beheld the huge wounded keeper and two others, with as many guns pointed at him.

"Are they loaded with shot or balls?" he asked, in the coolest manner.

"With balls, all, bandit!" replied Ajax.

"Then, aim straight at my breast, and don't disfigure my face, knaves! Then report to the king that you have slain Monsieur Clarence Fallon of the Household Guards."

"You one of the Household Guards, robber, and in that garb! What are you doing now in my house, after you slashed me with your sword?"

"Did you not see that being weary after the run, I was refreshing myself with your wine. Aim at the heart, if you fire."

And the gallant youth held a finger to the region indicated.

The other keepers whispered to Ajax, who growlingly retorted:

"Did not the bandit slash me with his sword—and what had he under his arm?"

"I slashed you when you twice assailed me with your gun," replied the dauntless young guardsman, "and what I had under my arm was no concern of yours."

"Will you surrender, and we will take you to the palace for trial!"

"I will not. Now take me if you can, you silly knave."

And the fearless youth made a dash back into the bedroom, closing the door after him, as he cried:

"Now for a siege if you will, and bear in mind that I have pistols also."

The three keepers rushed into the hut, Ajax firing at the door of the bedroom.

Maria Fouchard was again at the window, and she muttered to herself:

"What a brave youth, and he is a guardsman. Oh, how I could love him!"

Ajax heard the young man drawing a bolt on the inside of the bedroom door, and he flung his huge body against it, crying:

"We will have the bandit out and hang him up on the big elm tree."

In went the door with a crash, the huge keeper going with it, to fall heavily against the post of the bed.

Then out dashed the young guardsman with his sword flashing, as he cried:

"Make way there, knaves, or I'll slash your ears off. There you are."

The two stout keepers struck at the youth with their guns, and he cut at them, darting around as well as he could in the small room.

One of the keepers fell with an ugly cut on his cheek, and the young guardsman was defending himself from the blows of the other when Ajax came out of the bedroom and struck the youth on the back of the head with the gun.

Clarence fell on the floor as if dead, his limbs quivering and his eyes glaring.

"That settles the bandit," cried Ajax. "Now let us string him up as we would a robber, and report to the mayor."

"But what if he should be one of the Household Guards?" questioned the keeper who had come off without a cut.

"Bah! He is some sly bandit from the city out here in hiding with plunder. Did I not tell you he had something under his arm?"

"Then where is it now?"

"He has concealed his plunder, and we will search for it. Get the rope, and we will string him up."

Maria Fouchard was on thorns when she saw the handsome youth lying on the floor as if dead, and she cried:

"Ajax, that youth is a guardsman, and you will die for slaying him."

"Tis Maria Fouchard!" exclaimed the huge keeper, who was a young man and an admirer of the pretty maid of the tavern.

Then into the hut glided the girl, to bend down over the young guardsman and to press her hand to his heart.

"He lives yet," she cried, "and it is well for you that he does. Now for some liquor to revive him, and cold water."

When Clarence Fallon opened his eyes again he was reclining on a rough bed, with a very charming face close to his own.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RAVENS OF THE FOREST.

Acting on a very natural impulse for a gallant young soldier, Clarence's first movement was to raise his head a little and to kiss the red lips thus presented to him.

"Oh, I was afraid you would die," murmured Maria, as she returned the salute.

"Where am I, sweet girl?" he asked.

"You do not remember, then?"

"The last thing I remember was slashing away at an ugly knave with a gun. Yes, I remember now. A cowardly dog struck me from behind. Oh, but I'll carve that hound when I get at him."

Maria caressed the handsome youth and explained his posi-

tion in gentle terms, giving a plausible but not very truthful account of her own appearance at the hut.

"Then you are the girl who fled from the tavern with us?" questioned the youth.

"Yes, sir; but I trust you will not despise me for my low rank."

"Despise you, sweet one! Beauty has no rank save the highest for a soldier. Where are the rascals who assailed me now?"

"They are hiding in some den in the forest, fearing the anger of your friends."

"What time is it?"

"About nine o'clock."

"Nine o'clock! Why, it was after that hour when we fought the masked rascals in the tavern."

"That was last night, monsieur."

"Oh, mercy! What will the dear queen think of me? I will be accused of making way with the——"

The hot-headed youth curbed himself, and the wily girl smiled as she filled up the sentence:

"The casket. I know all about the precious jewels; and do you not remember that I fled from the tavern with your friend after restoring them to him?"

"Yes, yes; I remember now, adored girl. They are safe yet, I fondly trust."

"Be assured that they are safe yet where you placed them, monsieur, as not another soul has entered here since the keepers fled last night. Will I bring them to you?"

"Not yet. I feel weak and hungry. Have you bread and wine in this den?"

"In plenty. Are you strong enough to sit up?"

"I'll be as strong as ever when I eat and drink. Let us into the other room."

The young soldier sprang out of bed and walked into the other room without staggering, and the girl soon placed bread, pastry, and wine before him.

"By St. Dennis," the infatuated youth exclaimed, as he had satisfied his appetite, "but you are a hidden treasure, Maria—a bright, unknown gem—and you must be my dear wife."

"You are but jesting, monsieur."

"Jesting, indeed! Why, with comely silk robes and ornaments to adorn your matchless face and form, you would surpass any of the gorgeous ladies of the court in regal beauty."

The girl blushed and smiled slyly, while she hinted that she had some reason to doubt about Mother Fouchard being her real parent.

Maria agreed to accompany the youth to Versailles that night; and he was about to adjust his sword and pistols, when he turned on her suddenly, and inquired:

"Who were the masked knaves who fought us in the tavern last night, Maria?"

The girl hesitated in replying, and she would have persisted in keeping silent on the subject had she perceived the black face at the window peering in at them.

"Do you not confide in me, dear one?" continued the gallant youth, embracing the girl again.

"Yes, yes, to the death. Did you not hear of the Ravens of the Forest?"

"You mean the bandits who are becoming so infamous of late?"

"The same. The Ravens of the Forest attacked you and your friends last night, and their object was to secure the casket."

"The perfidious hounds! How could they know that the casket would be at the tavern?"

"I cannot answer that question. I only know that they expected you and your friends. My wicked mother is in league with them, I believe."

"Well, I'll soon have a blow or two at the dogs with a few of my friends. Now let us away!"

"But will you not take the casket with you?"

"No, no! It is safer where it is at present, as we may encounter some of the robber knaves."

"You encounter us now!" yelled a fierce voice, as a dozen armed men wearing hideous masks rushed into the hut to fall on Clarence and the girl.

The young guardsman was overpowered after a short struggle and borne to the floor, where he was secured with leather strips and blind-folded and gagged.

He was then dragged out into the woods and forced along for some distance, none of his captors uttering a word.

"The ravenous bandits are taking me to their rendezvous, and they are after the casket; but they cannot daunt me into betraying my trust."

Clarence then found himself descending a soft path, with the atmosphere growing colder at every step, when he was brought to a halt and raised to a hard platform, a loud voice crying:

"Ravens, heat your claws, and prepare to tear at this crow if he will not crow freely."

The gag was then removed from the youth's mouth, when he boldly answered:

"Dogs of bandits, you cannot daunt me with your threats, yet speak plainly what you desire."

"The casket you bore away from the tavern last night, crow. Confess where you have hidden it, or you will be tortured to death."

"Then torture away, you fiends, as a guardsman can die without betraying his trust."

"You confess that you have hidden the casket, and we will find it when you are dead."

"You cannot, dogs, as my spirit will guard it and restore it to its owner."

"Bah! Spirits do not trouble the Ravens of the Forest. Remove the bandage and let the crow see what the Ravens have prepared for him."

The young guardsman glared down and around him, when a strange and fearful spectacle was presented to his vision.

It seemed to him that he was seated on the top of a small natural, rugged rock about four feet high, and which appeared in the center of a large cavern.

The place was illuminated with many torches stuck around in hard walls, and at one end of the cavern a huge fire blazed up.

Some thirteen large figures stood close around the rock in a circle, with garments as black as the plume of the ominous bird mentioned, and each wearing a dark mask formed in a shape representing its head, including the large, ugly beak, and the dull, staring eyes.

Black feathers stood up from the sable hats of each of the band save the leader's, which was adorned with a snow-white plume.

Then each of the hideous band held aloft a long iron rod or poker, at the end of which were four iron prongs bent to resemble claws, which were heated to a red-hot glare.

At a signal from the leader, all the Ravens made motions as if about to tear at the prisoner with the red-hot claws, and he cried:

"Crow, will you give up the stolen casket or be torn asunder by the burning claws of the Ravens of the Forest?"

"Tear away, vultures," was the young guardsman's dauntless reply, "as you will never force Clarence Fallon from the path of honor."

CHAPTER VII.

THE YOUNG AMERICAN'S ADVENTURES.

"No, no! good friends, I will never believe that Monsieur Fallon is so base as to betray me; and shame on you, Hans Schobert!"

Thus exclaimed the noble young queen on the early evening after the disappearance of the young guardsman.

The old veteran Placide and the young American stood before the queen in her private sitting room, and they all bent their heads as if in deep dejection.

"Peace, peace," cried the queen, "Hans, you are a suspicious brute, and you will beg Monsieur Fallon's pardon if he lives."

"That I will, noble lady, if he returns with the casket."

"Noble lady," said Tornay, "it is true that we have failed thus far, but we beg of you to give us another chance."

"What do you propose, then, sir?"

"We propose to go forth again to-night in simple disguises and search the forest. From what I have heard to-day, I believe that our friend was waylaid by the robbers calling themselves the Ravens of the Forest."

"Then go forth, my brave friends, and rescue your friend, if he lives. I will say no more about the casket."

The young American and his new comrade withdrew to go forth in search of the missing youth, having agreed to act singly in the enterprise.

Henri Tornay—as the American youth styled himself—had been admitted as a cadet in the Household Guards that day. Benjamin Franklin being his surety as to good birth and training.

About eight o'clock that evening a horseman rode out to Fouchard's tavern on an ugly, lame hack that was almost ready for the boneyard.

Mother Fouchard was then giving vent to a passionate speech in the barroom, and crying out to a dozen or more of her guests:

"Yes, yes, I repeat it. I will give free entertainment here for a year to the brave gallant who will bring my wicked girl back to me, and some bright gold pieces in addition to him who slays the bandit who enticed her away."

"I'll accept the offer, dame," cried the horseman who had just arrived.

The newcomer was a man, to all outward appearance, over forty years of age, with a full, rakish beard, a swarthy complexion, a pair of rolling, restless eyes of no particular color, and he was tall and gaunt in structure.

His garments were of the shabby genteel order worn by the dandy desperadoes of Paris; his voice was sharp and penetrating, and the whole being of the man told of one at war with all laws, human or divine.

"A slasher from Paris," muttered one of the guests to a friend seated near him.

"And a promising recruit for us, if he could pass the ordeals," was the response.

The virago of the tavern strode toward the stranger with her large hands on her hips, as she demanded in her sauciest tones:

"And who are you, scarecrow, to come in here as if you were the duke of the province? If you want wine show your purse first."

"Gentle dame," was the flattering reply, "am I addressing the famous Madam Fouchard—once the toast of gay nobles?"

"You are, sir. And who are you, I pray?"

"I am known in Paris in certain circles as Tarquin, but my select friends call me Tartar. In truth, fair dame, I am a chevalier of the sword and of the dice, an adorer of fair women, and a bitter despiser of vulgar toil. There is a gold

piece left from my last venture, and produce a bottle of your choicest wine."

The chevalier of the sword flung himself on a chair near a table and glanced defiantly around, as if he meant to say:

Mother Fouchard picked up the gold piece and examined it carefully before she smiled on her blustering guest.

"Good sir," she then said, in softer tones, "what meant you by saying that you would earn the rewards I offered? The wine is coming."

"What could I mean, once adorable dame and still so entrancing, but that I am prepared to restore your daughter and to kill the wolf who stole her away?"

"Do you know where my Maria is then?"

"Not I, but I will soon find her."

"You speak like a braggart, sir," cried a tall, full-bearded man, who had been seated alone in a corner of the room.

The stranger from Paris was on his feet on the instant, and out flew his sword as he confronted the tall, full-bearded man.

"Arise and draw, serpent," he cried, "as this great world is too small for the both of us."

The big-bearded man only smiled up at the braggart, and cried aloud:

"Gamut!"

"Here, chief," cried a squeaky voice, as a small hunchback with fiery red hair appeared from the side door, sword in hand.

"Dress down the coxcomb, Gamut. Pierce his ears and nose, as I have rings for them."

"I'll at him, captain," squeaked the dwarf, "and you know I'm an artist at the work."

The little fellow struck at the cavalier of the sword without any parley, and that worthy retreated as he defended himself, crying:

"Mountebank fox, I'll make your master rue it for setting you on me. Your sword is mine, and I claim a lock of your hair."

Two rapid movements of the chevalier's arm disarmed the dwarf and deprived him of a long lock of his red hair, the victor grasping the hilt of the flying weapon as it fell from the ceiling.

The foxy dwarf danced with rage as he stared down at the red lock, and then at the sword in the left hand of the chevalier.

"He is a wizard," he screamed, "and he looks like the evil one himself. Give me the sword back, and I will be your slave if you cut off the other lock."

The chevalier made a curtly salute as he extended the hilt of the weapon to the dwarf.

"Sir Gamut," he said, in mocking tones, "I will act as your barber with pleasure. On your guard!"

The struggle was renewed, but it lasted only a few moments.

As if disdaining to waste more time on such an opponent, the chevalier made a few rapid passes, and the dwarf lost the red lock on the other side of his head, the sword flying up to be caught as before.

While the shouts of approval were yet ringing out from the spectators, the seedy chevalier turned on the big bearded man and struck him on the breast with the flat of the dwarf's sword.

"Now, badger," he cried, "select a friend present, and I will fight the pair of you at once. If I am a braggart, I will be at your mercy."

The big man only answered by rising from the chair and walking out of the side door, saying:

"Follow me, chevalier."

The chevalier bowed to those in the room and threw a kiss at Mother Fouchard as he retreated after the other, crying:

"Yes, fair dame of yore, I swear to restore to you your lovely daughter."

The big man led the way out into the orchard, looking care-

fully around ere he turned and stopped under an apple tree, when he demanded of the chevalier in brusque tones:

"What do you seek here, sir?"

"I seek to join the Ravens of the Forest, most noble captain."

"Where do you come from?"

"My last permanent residence was in a palatial mansion known as the Bastille, where I was sent for scoffing at the Austrian woman who is called Marie Antoinette."

"Then you escaped from that prison?"

"Yes, three nights ago."

"You speak with a slight foreign accent, Monsieur Tarquin."

"I acquired that in England, where I operated on the highways for several years."

"Indeed! And what name did you bear there?"

"Claude Duval."

"Claude Duval! Are you that famous highwayman, in truth?"

"I have that honor, captain, but I would not have it known to the common herd here, as you may understand."

"I will keep your secret. Why, you should be rich now."

"Rich I am, in experience, but poor in purse, yet I have a heart and a sword still. Can I serve with the Ravens of the Forest?"

"Why do you seek me on the subject?"

"Through an instinct that tells me you are the leader of the famous band, and I know that you are now disguised in face and voice."

"Then you must know that you are braving death by making such assertions."

"Bah! If I feared death I would not be here to join you."

"You cannot imagine the ordeals you must encounter before you can become a Raven of the Forest."

"To thunder with the ordeals! I will pass through them as readily as I clipped the locks of your foxy dwarf, who is a good hand at fence, by the way."

"The best in the band after myself. You will come with us soon."

That reckless cavalier was Henri Tornay; and he was led into the secret cave of the Ravens within an hour, with a bandage on his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLACIDE MOVES HIS WAY.

On that same evening a stout, low-sized man, with a discolored face, moved slowly through the dense forest, with his head bent down.

The old blouse worn by the loungeur was blacker than his face, a peaked cap fell down over his eyes, and his lower garments were in a tattered condition.

That loungeur was the quiet young guardsman known as Placide, and he was rigged up so as to present the appearance of one of the charcoal burners living in the dense forest.

The young guardsman was moving very silently along the path leading to the hut of the huge forester known as Ajax, and he was then drawing near to it.

Yet silently as the youth moved along his footsteps were noticed, and a subdued voice from the bushes saluted him, saying:

"Hist, friend, and steal in this way. Do you see Ajax, the keeper?"

The bold guardsman moved into the bushes on hearing the voice, when he saw a huge young man with a bandage on his head crouching behind the trunk of a tree.

Putting on a stupid expression the disguised youth answered:

"I do see Ajax the keeper, and I am his friend."

"I do not remember seeing you before, neighbor?"

"Oh, how could you remember all the poor charcoal men in the forest, but I see that you are injured, good Ajax."

"It is not much, but it bleeds afresh. Those soldiers slash badly sometimes. But is there much excitement yonder about him?"

"There is. The whole army will be out in search of him in the morning."

"Then I am a dead man, if he is found in the hut; and that witch of a girl will not have him removed to a safer place. Do they suspect me in Versailles now?"

"Not yet. I heard at the tavern that the youth was known to enter the forest last night with Maria Fouchard, and foul play is feared, as the girl has not returned to her home. Where are they now?"

"There, in my hut. The sweet witch is tending to him, but he is senseless yet, as I peered in at the window a short while ago."

"How did it all happen, good Ajax?"

The terrified and unsuspecting fellow gave an honest account of his encounters with Clarence Fallon on the previous night, and he added:

"I vow by the saints, friend, that I took him for a slasher from Paris seeking a spot to bury his stolen treasure; and I would have shot myself before assailing him had I known who he was. And now his comrades will hack me limb from limb, as I know what the young guardsmen are."

"It is a bad scrape, Ajax, but the youth may be only stunned. I will pay him a visit."

"Yes, do; and come back here to report to me. One moment longer."

"Well, Ajax?"

"Beware of the Ravens of the Forest, as they are prowling around to-night."

"But they would not molest a poor beggar like me."

And young Placide stole silently away toward the hut, the gestures of the keeper showing him the direction in which it lay.

The young guardsman looked carefully around as he reached the front of the little building, but he could not perceive any of the prowling Ravens.

Drawing nearer, he peered in at the little front window; and then his heart throbbed with joy as he beheld his beloved comrade smiling at the pretty maiden while enjoying the nourishing food she had placed before him.

Placide then fell back among the trees, from the cottage, and he seated himself to watch in silence.

He was not seated there two minutes when two masked men stole from the bushes behind him, creeping forward like tigers to spring at and secure the young guardsman before he could strike a blow.

Having secured the prisoner's arms behind him, one of the masked men held a pistol to his head and hissed out:

"Back with us, knave, and you will report to our chief."

The disguised youth looked and acted as if terrified out of his senses by the sudden assault, and he only stared stupidly at his captors as they dragged him back into the dense bushes.

The young guardsman was dragged along for some distance, when the masked men who held him drew up in a small opening, and another of the unsightly Ravens appeared before them.

"Who is this?" asked the third man, who spoke with an air of authority and in gruff tones.

The others described how they had noticed the prisoner spying on the cottage, and they deemed it their duty to seize him.

"What were you spying around there for, you black rascal?" demanded the leader.

"I was but seeking my friend, Ajax, good master, and that is not a crime," was the youth's simple answer.

"Then why did you not enter his hut like an honest man?"

"I did not like to intrude when I saw the strangers in there."

The chief of the Ravens questioned the disguised youth in severe tones for some minutes, when he said to the others:

"We are only wasting time with this idiot. Gag him and secure him to a tree back there, so that he cannot arouse the keepers."

The stout young guardsman felt very uncomfortable when he found himself bound to a tree in the dense forest, yet he did not despond.

The robbers had scarcely turned their back on him when he set to work to free his arms, and he was tugging away when a cautious voice close to him remarked:

"I feared the Ravens would seize you, friend."

"Ah, Ajax, it is you. Release me, and I will stand a treat."

The keeper set about releasing his pretended friend as he eagerly inquired:

"What of the youth in the hut?"

"He was eating ravenously when I looked in at the window."

"Hist, and fall back here, as the Ravens are coming this way now."

And the big fellow drew the youth back into the bushes, where they crouched down.

They could then perceive the masked band moving along, with Clarence and Maria as prisoners.

"They are taking them to the rendezvous," whispered Ajax, "but they will not injure Maria. I will back to my hut now and sleep in peace."

"You must not, coward. That prisoner is my sworn comrade, and you must aid in rescuing him or die on the instant! I am one of the Household Guards, and this is but a disguise."

While thus speaking Placide drew a small pistol and pointed it at Ajax.

The big fellow stared stupidly at the weapon, and Placide seized him by the arm.

"Come on," continued the intrepid youth, "and prove yourself a man. You are in the king's service, and you must strike for my friends."

With the pistol at his head the big fellow was pliant in the hands of the dauntless youth, and they kept on the trail of the Ravens.

Ajax was as brave as a lion in fighting poachers, but he was in intense dread of the terrible band lately infesting the forest, the Ravens having slain several victims in the most cruel manner.

CHAPTER IX.

THEY ACT TOGETHER.

Clarence Fallon did not even close his eyes as the thirteen Ravens pounced on him with their red-hot claws, but he glared at those in front of him as he cried:

"Claw away, you vultures, but my death will keep you from ever securing the casket."

The red-hot claws were within an inch of the youth's face and body, and he could feel the burning heat from them, when all the Ravens drew suddenly back at a word from their leader.

"The prisoner speaks wisely," he cried, "and we will not use our claws on him yet. But he will be forced to confess."

"Never," cried the young guardsman. "Oh, that I were free, with my good sword against the whole of your accursed brood."

The leader did not pay any attention to the words of the prisoner, as he appeared to be in deep meditation.

"Keep the claws hot," he soon cried, raising his head, "and bring forth the new candidate. We will put him to a test with the prisoner."

All the Ravens stuck their iron claws in the fire again, and two of them withdrew to lead out the chevalier of the sword,

who was blind-folded, as they supposed, while he was also disarmed."

"Chevalier," commenced the leader, "you are now called on to pass through the first ordeal toward admittance to our band."

"And I am ready," was the reckless reply, "for any task that a brave man may perform."

"We have a prisoner here who holds a secret from us," continued the leader, "and he will not confess, even when threatened with a terrible death. You must force that secret from him."

"Who is he and what is his secret?"

"It is not necessary that you should know more about him at present."

"But I will know all if I force him to confess, as I swear I will."

"Then you can look on him, and you may know that he is one of the young slaves of the foreign woman we hate."

The bandage was removed from the eyes of the reckless chevalier, and he glared up at the young prisoner and then around at the Ravens.

"What do you want the youth to confess, chief?" the disguised youth asked.

"Where he has secreted a valuable casket that was placed in his care last night."

Clarence Fallon did not recognize the young American, yet he felt that the stranger was a friend in need.

"Are you a soldier?" asked the chevalier.

"I am."

"Then you would crave to die, if you must perish, by the weapon of a soldier?"

"I would."

The chevalier bowed to the prisoner and he turned to the chief of the Ravens.

"Captain," he said, "if you wish me to secure the casket you prize so much, I must have the privilege of making my own terms with the prisoner."

"But what if you should fail after making your own terms?"

"Then slay me on the instant."

"Propose the terms to him then."

"Now, prisoner," said the chevalier, "you have great confidence in your skill as a swordsman?"

"Yes, in a noble cause."

"Then this is my proposition. The casket spoken of was given in your charge, I presume, and you are ready to die before surrendering it?"

"I am."

"Will you encounter me with swords on equal terms, the victor to claim the casket?"

"I do not understand you," answered the prisoner, shaking his head as if perplexed.

"I will be plainer then. If you defeat me in the contest you will be free to leave here at once and go your way. If I defeat you I am to receive the casket, while you remain at the disposal of the Ravens of the Forest."

Clarence Fallon pondered over the proposition a few minutes.

"I cannot accept the terms proposed," he answered, "as the casket was placed in my care only, and it is not mine."

"But I thought you had so much confidence in your skill as a swordsman?"

The prisoner was about to decline the proposal again, when a peculiar glance flashed on him from the eyes of the unknown, and he cried, as if in sheer desperation:

"I accept the terms, but I must be assured of my safety, if I defeat you, sir; as how would I trust the honor of such vultures?"

Turning to the leader of the Ravens, the chevalier asked:

"Have you confidence in me as a swordsman, captain, and will you abide by the terms proposed?"

"Yes, and I will."

"And I swear to you, prisoner," cried the pretended chevalier, "that I will stand to you to the death if the chief of the Ravens will not keep faith with you."

"Then I accept your proposal, sir, and I will tell you where the casket is concealed if you defeat me," replied Clarence, as he perceived another peculiar glance bent on him.

The prisoner was then released from the rock, a sword was handed to him, and the Ravens drew their own weapons to surround and to guard the combatants.

Another weapon was handed to the reckless chevalier, who advanced to measure weapons with his opponent as he remarked:

"Now for death or the casket."

"Death or the casket for me," responded Clarence, as he braced himself for the struggle, while eagerly on the watch for some secret signal from the unknown.

All the Ravens circled around the combatants with their weapons ready, the utmost excitement prevailing the while.

The swordsmen were placed in an open space between the rock and the fire at the end of the cave, and the Ravens then formed themselves so as to oppose any attempt at an escape on the part of the prisoner to the opening on the other side.

At a word from the chief the swordsmen set on, and the play commenced.

Clarence Fallon struck away as if in deadly earnest, as he really was, not knowing as yet what to make of the stranger, and the latter retreated towards the fire, the Ravens moving after them.

"You'll be in the fire," yelled the chief, as the chevalier's back touched one of the claw-pokers, "and move to the side, chevalier."

The disguised young guardsman turned to the side, when he suddenly seized one of the red-hot rods and jovially cried:

"Let us fight with double weapons. Dash at the dogs, friend Fallon, as I am Tornay."

The last sentence was uttered in tones that could only be heard by Clarence, who seized one of the instruments of torture also, still keeping play with the sword.

The friends then turned suddenly and dashed together on their enemies with the claws and swords, young Tornay yelling:

"Cut and claw the vile Ravens. Show the vultures how the guardsmen of the queen can strike against her enemies."

"And I strike with you, comrades," cried a voice near the rock, as the disguised Placide shot down one of the Ravens and dashed at the others with his sword. "I must secure a claw also."

CHAPTER X.

WITH SWORDS AND CLAWS.

Before the astounded leader could give a single order, Placide burst through their ranks, cutting down two of the robbers, and he dashed at the fire to seize a red-hot claw.

The others were then slashing and clawing like so many eagles attacking a flock of crows.

Although all the masked men had their swords ready when the young guardsmen were fencing, Clarence and Tornay struck four of them down before the others returned a blow.

Cries of joy greeted the appearance of the stout youth with the black face; and Placide was so active in his movements that he had secured a red-hot claw, to be on a level with the others, before the leader of the Ravens called on his men to form and strike back.

"To the opening with one of you," he also cried, "and give the alarm signal!"

One of the startled robbers dashed to the opening of the cave as if glad to escape from the carnage, and those who survived made some show of rallying around their leader.

Five of the Ravens still remained to oppose the dauntless young guardsmen; and the robbers fell back toward the opening, defending themselves with desperation, their leader crying:

"Hold the fiends in check, brave Ravens, and we will soon avenge our fellows!"

"Dash on the vultures!" yelled Clarence Fallon, who struck as if possessed with the fury of a madman.

And down went a foe before him.

Tornay made at the leader and struck at him with sword and claw, as he cried:

"I will not slay you yet, captain, but you will feel the claw."

"Burst through the dogs," cried Placide, "or they will have others here soon, as the woods swarm with the vultures."

The leader of the Ravens fell with the mask torn from his face, but his false beard still remained to conceal his features.

The other guardsmen soon disposed of those in front of them, and the two remaining robbers turned to flee, one of them yelling:

"We cannot fight against such demons. To the rescue out there!"

"Press on," yelled Placide, as he seized a burning torch and dashed into a dark narrow passage after the fugitives, "or they'll block our way outside."

The others ran after him along the narrow passage, Tornay crying:

"Gain the forest, and we will defy a horde of the robbers."

"And I have friends mustering outside," responded the stout youth. "Ha, we are trapped a little now!"

The stout youth drew up before a solid rock.

"Is that the doorway to the cave?" inquired the young American, as he pushed at the huge rock and felt it on all sides.

"I fear it is. I entered here in the darkness, after I had seen it gliding aside to admit those who dragged Fallon here."

"And they left it open, after entering?"

"Yes, but they left two sentinels outside as they came in."

"Then you dispatched the sentinels, brave comrade of mine," remarked Clarence Fallon. "Ah! I knew you would not desert me."

"Let us compel one of the wounded Ravens to open the way," suggested Placide.

"A wise suggestion, and let us back!" responded Tornay, leading the way.

Placide followed with the torch, and Fallon kept beside his old comrade.

They had then gained the opening into the cave, and Tornay drew back, crying:

"By the gods, some the wounded rascals have disappeared!"

"And the leader among them!" cried Fallon, as he glared around.

"Then beware of an ambush!" quietly remarked the cool Placide.

"Two of them lie over there, and they must be dead."

It was Tornay who made the last remark; and the three friends stood just inside the opening gazing around.

"Maria, Maria," cried young Fallon aloud, as if he had suddenly remembered the bewitching creature from the tavern.

"I am here, Monsieur Fallon," answered a pleasant voice, as the girl darted out of a small apartment near the main entrance, "and I have just eaten away the lashes the beasts put on my wrists. Your friends?"

The disguised American stared at the girl a moment and bowed to her, when he slyly whispered to Fallon:

"Do not say who I am."

Clarence Fallon warmly embraced the delighted girl as he said to his friends:

"This is a fair nymph who nursed me tenderly when I was in sore distress. Dear Maria, my two best friends."

"Young lady," said Tornay, abruptly, "can you tell us where the wounded bandits have retreated?"

"I can not, monsieur," answered Maria, "as I was confined in there since we came."

"To the rock," cried Tornay, "as the bandits from outside approach."

A rush of footsteps could then be heard in the narrow passage.

The three friends and the girl darted behind the rock, where they could be somewhat protected from the firearms of their expected assailants.

At a word from Tornay, they bore several of the heated claws with them, Maria grasping two of the rods.

They had scarcely crouched down behind the rock when some fifteen of the masked Ravens rushed in from the passage, a white plume waving on the leader's head.

"Now punish the young crows," the leader cried, as he ranged his men in front of the passage, "and they will be torn by the hot claws."

"Then try some first," yelled Tornay, as he raised his head above the rock and hurled one of the hot claws at the speaker.

The others followed his example, and the three hot rods struck as many of the Ravens.

Furious yells burst from the outlaws, their leader crying:

"Order there and watch my commands. The dogs have no firearms, and will soon be at our full mercy."

"You will feel our claws and swords again, bandit," cried Tornay, "and you will be at our mercy ere long. Keep shelter, friends."

The leader of the Ravens formed his band into two equal squads, leaving one to guard the entrance with their carbines presented.

He then led seven of the armed men along toward the rock, crying:

"Surrender now, crows, or we will mow you down with bullets."

"Go to perdition, vulture!" cried Tornay.

"Fire and charge," yelled the chief of the robber band, "but spare the girl!"

The carbines exploded, and six of the bullets rattled on the rock, but the seventh found a billet in young Tornay's left arm.

Before the smoke arose to the ceiling, the three young guardsmen dashed out from behind the rock to attack their foes with swords and claws, Tornay dashing at the white-plumed leader again.

Maria kept by the side of her dauntless admirer, and the girl struck at the Ravens like an Amazon, as she cried:

"Vile assassins, you would slay a helpless girl without mercy."

The Ravens dropped their carbines and drew their swords for the charge when the young guardsmen dashed at them, and then the bright weapons and the hot claws clashed together, with yells and cries resounding on both sides.

Other loud shouts could then be heard in the main entrance, and in through the Ravens posted there burst several keepers, with huge Ajax at their head.

"Down with the Ravens of the Forest," yelled the huge keeper, as he struck down one of the bandits, "and we are here, black friend."

"I hear you, Ajax," responded Placide, "and you were in good time. Down with the vultures there, and hasten this way."

CHAPTER XI.

"MY CHOSEN CHAMPIONS."

Ajax had six keepers with him when he dashed into the cave, and they were well armed with guns and hunting knives.

Clubbing the guns, the stout foresters struck at the Ravens near the entrance before the latter could fire the carbines, and the robbers at that station were soon overpowered or put to flight.

Three of the masked rascals dashed out through the passage, yelling for mercy, with as many of the keepers after them.

Ajax and his friends then swept down on the other Ravens engaged with the young guardsmen, Placide crying:

"Strike at the masked vultures only, my brave Ajax, and guard the girl."

"Retreat, retreat," yelled the leader of the band, who had then only three of his followers at his side, while he had received a severe wound on the shoulder.

The three guardsmen darted after the retreating Ravens, who fled behind the huge fireplace and disappeared, their leader yelling back:

"Crows of the foreign queen you will meet the Ravens of the Forest again."

Tornay was the first to dart behind the fireplace, when he saw a huge rock closing back in its place with a shock, and he drew back.

"That was the way the wounded bandits escaped," he said. "Let us out of here before they block the front way again."

"I think they had enough of our swords and claws to-night," replied Clarence Fallon, as he stared at the dead and wounded Ravens.

"I left two of my men at the mouth of the cave," said Ajax, as he wiped his brow after the sharp struggle.

"You are a brave, noble fellow," responded Placide, "and I promise that the queen will hear of your valiant deeds."

"But will your friend there pardon me?" asked Ajax, pointing to Clarence Fallon.

"Freely, freely, as I have nothing to forgive, good giant. I gave you a slash, and you gave me a blow. Ah! I forgot. Now, don't ever strike a foe from behind again."

"But I was certain that you were a thieving slasher from Paris, Monsieur Fallon."

"Then we will cry quits, Ajax. Now, let us all out to secure the casket, friends."

Maria still kept close to the handsome young guardsman as they all retreated to the forest, leaving the dead and wounded Ravens in the cave.

"Be on the alert," warned Tornay, as he led the way with Ajax, "although I fancy the Ravens will not assail us again to-night."

The party marched straight for the hut of the huge keeper; and when they gained the garden outside young Fallon called a halt.

"Remain outside here, all of you," he cried, "while I secure the casket. The hiding-place will remain a secret."

The cunning girl sighed again as her admirer disappeared in the cabin.

"Confusion," she muttered, "what a splendid opportunity has escaped me; but I vow that I will not despair of securing it yet."

The disguised young American was then close behind the girl, and he heard the muttered words:

"I must watch this creature," he said to himself, "and I must break the spell that she has flung over my new friend."

Clarence Fallon soon came out with the precious casket under his arm.

"To the palace now," he cried; "and the noble queen will hear of our adventures."

The keepers moved on through the forest with the guardsmen; and Maria was close to her handsome admirer again.

The queen was in the grand reception-room of the palace, and she was smiling on friends and foes alike, when old Hans Schobert stole behind her from a private door and whispered some words into her ear.

A joyous expression escaped from the beautiful woman as she arose and followed the old veteran, one of the courtiers remarking:

"The queen has received glad tidings."

Count Polo, who was present, noticed and noted the incident, and he turned to a famous nobleman near and whispered:

"The young cub must have returned with the casket, noble duke."

"Then your plundering Ravens have failed again."

"I fear as much; but the casket has not yet reached the frontier."

"And it must not. Out and away with you to muster more of my rascals. My spies here will soon inform me about the casket."

The queen was then receiving the precious casket from the hands of Clarence Fallon, and old Hans was kneeling beside the brave youth and exclaiming:

"Brave Monsieur Fallon, I request that you run your sword through my false, suspicious heart, as I was treacherous enough to accuse you of making off with the casket."

The fair queen clasped the hands of each of the young heroes in turn and she exclaimed:

"My chosen champions! Now, in good truth, I do not despair of baffling my treacherous enemies. With three such allies, I feel that I could defy the great and cunning Cardinal Richelieu himself, were he to arise from his grave to oppose me. My blessings on you all."

When the agitated lady had recovered her composure, she turned to the young guardsmen again with beaming smiles.

"And now," she continued, "dare I impose on your generous kindness again?"

"Are we not your chosen champions, noble lady?" answered Clarence Fallon.

"Yes, yes! The casket must be taken to the German frontier."

"Will you intrust us with the mission, dear, noble lady?" pleaded the young guardsman.

"Who else should I trust! What is the matter with Monsieur Tornay. Mercy! he is fainting!"

The dauntless young American was sinking to the floor when Clarence Fallon and Placide seized him and held him up, the former saying:

"Our brave friend has received a wound, and he has not mentioned it. Placide, he is to be our leader hereafter."

"Yes, as he is the wisest and bravest."

CHAPTER XII.

ON TO THE FRONTIER.

"It is but a flesh wound, kind friends, and I needed a little blood letting."

Such was the manner in which the young American alluded to his wound on the following morning, as he reclined on a bed in the quarters of the guards.

The surgeon had extracted the ball on the previous night while the young man was insensible, when he assured the friends near the bed that the youth would be fit for duty in a few days.

"When do we start for the frontier?" continued Tornay, in eager tones.

"Not until you are fully recovered," answered Clarence Fallon.

"But I will be ready for the road this evening, and we should not delay."

"It may be death to you to travel so soon, and on horseback at that."

"It will be death to remain inactive here while the noble queen requires my services. A few words on a delicate subject, friend Fallon."

"To me in particular?"

"Yes, to you in particular. Where is the girl you brought here?"

"The queen has her in charge."

"Then I beg of you, Monsieur Fallon, in all humility, that you will avoid that fair, young creature hereafter, and that you will not say a word to her regarding our important mission."

Clarence blushed to the eyes, and then demanded, in angry tones:

"What can you say against the fair girl, save that she is the daughter, perhaps, of humble parents?"

"We care not for rank or title in the land I come from, comrade, and that is not the reason I warn you about the girl."

Tornay then gave the infatuated youth an account of his adventure with Maria Fouchard, when he surprised her in the little bedroom with the casket.

"I am convinced," he continued, "that she followed you through the forest with the sole purpose of regaining the casket. I confess that she is pretty and enticing, but you will rue the day that you confide in the ambitious damsel."

"I cannot believe aught against her," protested the hot-headed Clarence; "but I will be silent with her regarding our mission. The fiends take me!"

"What is it now? I'll wager you have told her about the mission already!"

"No, I only gave her a hint that I was going away for some days. I'll cut my tongue out if evil comes of it."

"We will change our plans," quietly remarked Henri Tornay. "May I suggest a plan of action?"

"Certainly," replied Fallon, "as we are both pledged to be guided by you hereafter."

"Then I will ponder a little, and remember it is on to the frontier to-night."

It was after eight o'clock that night when three horsemen rode along a small road at the back of the palace grounds.

One of the riders appeared to be a Jew well advanced in life, who wore a large grayish beard, a thick, heavy cloak, and who had a valise strapped to his back under the mantle, thus giving him the appearance of a hunchback.

The companions riding on each side were rough-looking fellows, armed at all points, who would be taken for servants or hired protectors.

The riders soon made out on the high road leading to the north, and they galloped along by the Fouchard tavern without pausing.

The country was then open before them for some miles, and the old Jew remarked:

"We are safe so far, comrades, and they seem to be asleep in the tavern."

"The old witch is seeking her daughter in Paris," replied Clarence Fallon, who was one of the armed attendants.

"Will she find her there?" asked the pretended Jew, who was the young American.

"I cannot say. The damsel disappeared so suddenly this evening as to surprise me. Yet I believe she loves me."

"But she loves jewels and rich robes far better; I'll swear," laughed the young American. "And that reminds me of what

(Continued on page 20.)

Pluck and Luck

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

A cash-register that is fitted with a phonograph has made its appearance in St. Paul, Minn. It is the invention of a resident of that city. The phonograph announces the figures of each purchase.

It would probably puzzle the best of American statisticians to estimate even approximately the number of billiard tables in use in this country. There is no such difficulty in France, where the billiard table is a taxed luxury, and where its relative frequency in districts of all grades of population and wealth is made the subject of calculations as elaborate as they are ingenious. In all France, according to the latest figures available, there are 89,676 billiard tables, divided among 18,601 communes, and realizing more than \$200,000 in taxes.

It has been noticed that many plants not natives of the locality are to be found growing in the neighborhood of great railroad yards. Sometimes the seeds of these plants have been brought thousands of miles from their natural habitat. Often they flourish amid their new surrounding country. Thus the trains carry unsuspected emigrants, which travel to and from every point of the compass. In the Mississippi Valley are to be found plants which within a few years past have thus been brought together; some from the Atlantic seaboard, some from the gulf region, and some from the other side of the Rocky Mountains.

The wealth of Croesus, which has passed into a proverb, has been variously accounted for. The possessors of Sardis, the capital of the Lydian kings, were enriched by the neighborhood of the river Pactolus, which flowed down from Mount Timolus toward the Hermes, and brought with it considerable quantities of gold in its sands. To this cause historians often ascribe the abundant treasures belonging to Croesus and his predecessors; but Croesus also possessed other mines near Pergamus. Still another cause of wealth is to be found in the general industry of the Lydian people. They were the first (according to Herodotus) who ever carried on retail trade, and were among the earliest if not the first to coin gold and silver.

The crew of the bark Atlas, which arrived in Seattle recently after rounding the Horn from Philadelphia, reports a queer discovery for one day of the 138 of her voyage. She had been out many days without seeing anything—only three ships were

seen on the entire trip—when one morning in the Pacific the lookout reported that he had sighted land off the port bow where no land was supposed to be. Nor could any be found on the charts. It seemed low in the water, but too much like the real thing to be a mirage, so the captain ran toward it. It proved to be land, right enough; an island covered with trees and thick low underbrush. Birds and a few monkeys were seen upon it, but no other signs of life. These precluded the possibility of the island being of volcanic origin, and leads the captain to claim it as a floating island. He believes that it was washed out to sea from the delta of the Rio de la Plata or the Negro, and that the undergrowth was so thick that its roots held the whole together. As he saw two trees tumble into the water from the island's edge before he sailed away his theory appears to be somewhat substantiated.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

Mr. Thompson (at Newrich's musicale)—Did you notice with what style and grandeur Miss Amelia Newrich sweeps into the room? Mr. Kane—Yes; but when it comes to sweeping out a room, she isn't one, two, six with her poor old mother.

Lady (to her gardener)—John, I wonder you don't get married. You've got a fine house and a good wage. All you need is a wife. You know the first gardener that ever lived had a wife? John—Yes; but he didn't keep his job long after he got her.

A would-be musical enthusiast, speaking of a certain air in a new opera, exclaimed, "Oh, it is perfectly enchanting—it carries me away!" "Can anybody whistle it?" asked Jerrold, looking round imploringly on a little circle he was trying to talk to.

"It's impossible for you to lift yourself up by the bootstraps, isn't it, Johnny?" asked the teacher of a small pupil. "Yes'r," answered Johnny. "Now," continued the teacher, "can you tell me why it's impossible?" "I guess it's because I wear shoes," was the logical reply.

A Puritan preacher rebuked a young girl who had just been making her hair into ringlets. "Ah," said he, "had God intended your locks to be curled, He would have curled them for you." "When I was an infant," replied the damsel, "He did; but, now I am grown up, He thinks I am able to do it myself."

A wizen-faced newsboy climbed on a Detroit street car the other evening, and, worming his way past the conductor, walked down the aisle, yelling: "Las' edition—all about Sigler Brudders findin' de tray of dimons!" He sold several papers, and when he was passing out a man looked around and asked: "Say, boy, where did they find that tray?" The youngster paused in the doorway. "In a pack o' cards!" he shouted, and disappeared.

A youngster who was taken to a toy bazaar by his doting mamma was shown a number of articles by the attentive salesman. At last a papier-mache model of a mouse was produced and, after being wound up by a key, was set down upon the floor, where it ran about in the most mouse-like manner imaginable. The youngster's attention was enlisted at once, but the result was not as his mother or the salesman expected, for he shouted, "Oh, mamma, I don't want that! We've got lots of them at home, and don't have to wind 'em up, either."

Adventures With Devil-fish

By Alexander Armstrong.

"That fish," said the speaker, pointing to a black object out on the wall like an immense bat, "was the subject of one of my most exciting adventures off the southwest coast of Florida."

The speaker had not long returned from an expedition to the Gulf of Mexico and the tropic seas, bringing with him a great accumulation of material collected.

I glanced at the huge monster covering upwards of twenty square feet of space on the wall, and was quite prepared to agree with him.

"We selected a day for hunting the devil fishes," he observed, "when the wind was blowing a gale and storms hung on the seas, convinced that they would be found in the vicinity of sandbars.

"We left our anchorage at Punta Rassa very early in the morning, and quickly shot out into the bay.

"Our boat was a schooner of some sixteen tons burden, with a crew including myself, of five persons.

"As we were plunging rapidly through the water a huge object was noted moving as quickly in the opposite direction.

"It was an enormous devil fish, measuring certainly eighteen feet across his wings.

"In an instant I darted the harpoon into his flesh, and payed out the line.

"So swiftly were we moving in opposite directions that when the end of the line was told off the instrument tore out of the fish, bringing a large piece with it.

"There was a great flounder and splash of water, blood spurted and commingled with the sea for yards around, and the animal sank from sight.

"We passed on reluctantly, for, without exception, this was the largest and most terrible of the species I ever saw.

"It might have been one o'clock in the afternoon, when, after several similar adventures, we espied a school of thirteen of these creatures playing about in the water.

"They did not seem to play with each other, but flopped about, turned over and over, and attended to their individual games.

"It was raining very hard, and a great gale was lashing the seas with its fury.

"However, though we were discouraged by the previous occurrences, I was determined to have one of them.

"Accordingly, I dispatched two men in a small boat, with instructions to harpoon a medium-sized one in the head.

"The boat passed into the school undisturbed, while the schooner drifted fully three hundred feet away.

"I was at the helm, when suddenly I heard distinctly, though at that long distance, and the wind blowing in the opposite direction, the dull thud of the harpoon crashing through the heavy skull of one of the fish.

"A wild shout rent the air, as all understood that a fish was made fast.

"In an instant the monster made a terrific lunge, the blood spurting in great quantities, while water, ropes, and materials flew high in the breeze.

"Its mates darted through the water, and put out to sea.

"The rage of the now aroused animal was something to behold.

"Of a sudden it shot beneath, and brought up a huge wing, throwing the small boat partially out of the sea, and so careening it that it nearly filled with water.

"The fish now made out to sea with all rapidity, towing the boat after it as if it were a feather.

"Behind it was a path of blood.

"We gave chase with the schooner, finally caught a rope heaved to us from the yawl, and made fast to it.

"The men were taken on board, and the ship was brought in proximity to the monster.

"Now came the tug of war.

"It was utterly impossible for the entire crew to lift it on board, and to add to our discomfiture, the thing kept those wings splashing water all over us and the ship.

"Finally I pushed a long gaff-pole down through its gills.

"A rope was passed around the lower end of this, bringing both ends to a level with the water.

"To each end of this the ship's tackle was attached, and by hard pulling and lifting, we succeeded in hauling it on board.

"Soon after it died from its wounds.

"It weighed something over eight hundred pounds.

"It measured nearly eleven feet from tip to tip of the wings, and the same from the tip of the tail to the snout.

"Its color was black on the back, with a white belly, spotted occasionally with dark colorings.

"The tail was some five feet long, and similar to that of the skate.

"The eyes three feet apart.

"It moves through the water with great rapidity, and has a smooth, butterfly motion.

"It feeds on jelly-like weeds.

"The food is thrown into the mouth by the two paddles situated on each side of the head, these paddles serving the same purpose to the devil fish as the trunk does to the elephant.

"It is vidently not a beast of prey, as it exhibits little concern for surrounding objects, and only attacks when wounded or disturbed.

"In this case it brings its heavy wings and tail into powerful use."

* * * * *

The monster which figured in the following tragedy is evidently another species of the devil fish, and better known as the octopus.

Early in August a party of Cape Flattery or Makaw Indians, returning from a visit to their friends (the Songish, of Victoria) encamped the first afternoon out on the beautiful bay of Metchosen.

The weather being very fine, most of the party went bathing, and among the number a maiden of perhaps eighteen summers, who had accompanied her grandfather on the trip.

Desiring seclusion, she went round a point away from the other bathers and being known as a bold swimmer, is supposed to have taken a header into deep water.

However taken, it proved to have been a plunge into the arms of death, for when the swimmers reassembled around the camp fire the girl was missed, and notwithstanding a diligent search that evening, could not be found.

The following morning, with sad hearts, the party left, but very soon those in the foremost canoe, on rounding the first point, saw (the water being calm and clear) a human body, as if seated on the sandy sea-bottom, with what seemed like a flour bag immediately behind it.

The natives knew what this meant.

As soon as the canoes got together, two of the most active young men dived down and managed with daggers so to disable the monster (for it was a gigantic devil fish) that the octopus with its victim was brought to the surface.

An intelligent and respectable half-breed woman from Metchosen, who saw the body of the drowned girl with some of the prehensiles of the mollusk still adhering to it, compared

the head of the octopus in size to that of a fifty-pound flour sack, full; and said that the tentacles were twelve in number, of different sizes, and the largest about the circumference of a man's arm.

WILLIE MULKITTLE.

Willie Mulkittle went to Sunday-school alone. Mr. Mulkittle did not attend, as he had been summoned to the country to preach the funeral of a well-known citizen, upon whom the cold hand of death had been spread. This was the first time the boy had ever walked the streets alone, and everything he saw appeared to him in such an advanced light of freedom, so changed, so novel, that a strong desire to loiter and investigate was only subdued by the recollection of his mother's warning; but when he saw a dog killing a rat in front of a livery stable, he turned for a moment to witness the performance. He looked at the motley-faced boys that crowded around and wondered why they were allowed to amuse themselves at will, but when he heard one of them use a "bad word," his mother's warning arose before him, and he hurried along, just as one of the boys called out:

"Say, if you don't like our way of doing business, come back and help yourself."

"Why, here's little Willie Mulkittle all alone," said old Miss Gramling, the teacher, when the boy presented himself at the catechism station. "Why, who came with you?"

"Come by myself, an' saw a dog kill a rat."

A red-headed young "rooster," the son of a hide merchant, snorted, and young Mulkittle, regarding him with a look of amusement, asked:

"Is your pa dead?"

"You bet he ain't. I ain't, neither, an' if you don' believe it, wait till this thing's over."

"Hush, children," said old Miss Gramling. "You must not quarrel. George," turning to the red-headed "rooster," "this little boy, born under the sound of the gospel, and reared in the atmosphere of the Bible, is not an associate of the gamin."

"Well, he can't run over me," said George, bristling up like a spiteful "shoat." "When I ketch him out I'll fix him."

Miss Gramling belonged to that old class of ladies, descendants from men of more courage than accomplishment. Turning to young Mulkittle, she said:

"Willie, if this boy bothers you, hit him."

The busy hum of recitation began. In no hall of learning do you hear such an intermingling of voices as the Sunday-school room. The lisp of the child, the squawk-like utterances of the boy in the "gosling age," when the voice is uncertain, and the sharp, whisper-like accents of the young lady, and the deep, subdued-intonations of the man, all arise at once to make a Babel of vocalization.

The superintendent, a grave man, who spends his week days in burying the dead, and his Sundays in teaching the living, approached Miss Gramling's class, and seeing young Mulkittle, gently stroked his curly head and asked:

"Where is your father?"

"Gone to the country. He went the other day an' brought home some back-bones and spare-ribs what a man give him."

The superintendent smiled, showing a plugged tooth, polished like the handle of one of his coffins, and asked:

"Who was the strongest man?"

"Samson."

"Who the wisest?"

"Snakes?" said the boy, with an air of inquiry.

"Oh, no. You are thinking of the injunction, 'Be ye, therefore, as wise as serpents and harmless as doves.' Solomon was the wisest man."

"Solomon," repeated the child, with a solemnity of manner illustrative of an effort to embed the fact in his memory.

"Who was it that made the ax swim?" continued the superintendent, glancing at the teacher as though he doubted whether or not she could answer the question. "It was Elisha," continued the superintendent, fearing that the teacher might possibly give the correct answer, and thereby exhibit learning not anticipated.

"Tell me about him."

"Well, the prophet was with a man who had chopped wood beside the river and the ax flew off the handle and sank in the water. The poor man was very much alarmed, especially as the ax was not his own."

"That's why I wouldn't care," said the red-headed boy, pinching the arm of a little girl who sat near him. The superintendent gave him an annihilating glance, and, turning to young Mulkittle, continued: "But the prophet told him not to lament, and going to the water he threw a stick where the ax sank, and the ax arose to the surface."

"Did the bad man want the ax to come up?"

"I don't know."

"Did he want it to come off?"

"I can't tell."

"Was that the ax what was laid at the root of the tree?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

"Because," said the superintendent looking around for some excuse to get away.

"Because what?"

"I must go," and the grave man walked away. Meeting an old deacon, he stopped him, and pointing to the boy, whispered something.

"That boy," replied the deacon, "no, I don't want any in mine."

While young Mulkittle was walking toward home, George, the red-headed boy, darted out of the alley, confronted him and said:

"Wanter run over me, do you?"

"No. Go away; I must go home."

"You said I was a liar."

"No, I didn't. Go away, please."

"Yes, you did, and you said that my pa wears a cow-hide shirt."

"I declare I didn't, an' anybody what says so is a story-teller."

"You know what you are?"

"Yes, I'm a boy," replied Mulkittle.

"Yes, an' you are a liar, an' I dare you to take it up. You are a coward, and afeered to fight."

"I don't want to fight."

"Your old pa is a lyin' preacher," concluded George.

Young Mulkittle stood for a moment, the embodiment of anger. He seemed to grow taller. He was no longer a meek child.

His father had been slandered. Springing forward, he seized George with a strength no one would think he could summon, hurled him against the wall, and then, with a blow from his fist spattered blood from his nose. He was wild with excitement, and the cries of the insulter called not for mercy, but incited revenge. George fell, and young Mulkittle, bounding upon him, stamped him in the face, and, throwing himself upon him, tore his hair in his wild career of fury. Finally young Mulkittle left his prostrate foe and went home. He saw his father and another man standing on the steps. The man, it seemed, was detailing the fight. The minister rushed forward, seized his son, and pressed a curly head against a breast heaving with a father's manly love and pride.

(Continued from page 16.)

the queen whispered to me this evening as she gave me the jewels, requesting that I would inform each of you."

"What did the noble lady tell you?"

"She told me that the gems we have in charge are destined to be placed in the hands of a very rich German banker, as a security for a large loan he is to make to the French government."

"For carrying on the war with England?"

"For sending an army and a fleet to aid my gallant countrymen, who are striving to throw off the English yoke forever. Oh, comrades, how I adore that noble lady!"

"We all adore her," responded Placide. "Where will we stop to-night?"

"Not till we reach Mollens."

"How far is it?"

"About forty miles."

"A long ride before supper and wine," remarked Placide, "but we have good hacks, and I trust we leave the Ravens of the Forest behind us."

"Would that we were sure of that," said Tornay; "and I am troubled about that girl."

"And why?" asked young Fallon.

"Because I believe that she has sworn to make another effort for the casket."

"You wrong my sweet Maria, as I will yet prove," retorted Fallon. "Ah, comrade, you should be in love yourself."

"Perhaps I am. Who comes along?"

A single horseman was dashing along after the riders at a furious pace, and they held up a little, Tornay saying:

"This may be a messenger from the queen."

The furious rider was soon close up with the disguised travelers.

"It's a boy," remarked Fallon.

"It is Gamut, the dwarf I told you about," said the young American, "and be on your guard."

The red-haired dwarf was soon close beside the travelers, and he scrutinized them carefully from under his shaggy eyebrows, as he muttered aloud:

"It may be those I seek, but it is not the description I received."

"Well, friend," remarked Tornay to the hunchback, "did you ride to seek us?"

"It will depend on who you are. If you are a real Jew, I seek you not."

"Who do you seek then?"

"One who wields a sword better than David used the sling."

"Is the swordsman you seek much of a barber, little friend?"

The dwarf started convulsively, and drew his horse near the disguised youth, as he cried:

"I knew you were a wizard. Did I not swear that I would be your slave, master?"

"You did. Why do you seek me now?"

"To warn you, great master, that you have foes ahead lying in wait."

"Who are they, and how many, good Gamut?"

"The Ravens are in swarms along the forests, and they have spies out."

"Many thanks, good Gamut, for your warning. And do you keep on?"

"I do, master; and I will watch on the route to warn you again. Where do you first stop?"

"At Mollens."

"I will be there."

And away dashed the dwarf, young Fallon saying:

"Push on, friends, and we will reach the frontier with the casket, despite all the Ravens in France."

It was only a few minutes past twelve when the travelers

drew up at the only tavern in Mollens, and their horses were much jaded.

The landlord was soon aroused; and a gold piece from the pretended Jew served to hasten his people in preparing supper for men and beasts.

The three friends were seated in the back room on the first floor an hour after, and they had just finished hearty meals, when a head was thrust into the window and a squeaky voice cried:

"Be on your guards, master, as the Ravens are coming. Warn the people to silence and retreat to the stable."

"The real tussle is coming, comrades," said Tornay, "but we will be ready. Into the stable with you, and I will see to the landlord."

Even while the young American was speaking nine masked riders dashed up to the front of the tavern.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LEADER OF THE RAVENS.

Tornay could tell that the strangers did not ride from the direction of Paris, and he then reasoned to himself that they could not be informed as to the disguise he had adopted.

As a previous precaution, there were no lights in the front rooms of the tavern; and a few words to the landlord caused the lowering of the lamp in the room where they had supper.

As the two young guardsmen slipped out into the stable, their leader said to them:

"Take your horses back behind the stable, leaving mine where he is."

A loud knocking on the front door soon announced that the masked strangers proposed to stop at the tavern; and the young American pressed another gold piece into the landlord's hand, as he whispered:

"Remember that I am the only guest who arrived from Paris to-night, and my servants are not to be mentioned."

The pretended old Jew then took a seat in the back room, and the landlord admitted some of the masked horsemen by the front way.

"Any guests here to-night?" demanded the leader, after he had called for wine and some solid refreshments for his party.

"Only a Jewish merchant on his way to the north, monsieur."

"Where is he?"

"Sitting in the back room while his wearied horse is taking oats."

The leader of the band strode into the back room and glared at the old Jew from under the mask for some moments.

"When did you leave Paris, Father Abraham?" demanded the masked man, in haughty tones.

"About eight o'clock, monsieur," was the humble reply of the Jew.

The disguised youth could then notice another of the masked riders peering in at him from the front room with marked attention.

The person Tornay thus noticed was of a boyish appearance, and he bore himself in a jaunty manner, while keeping aloof from the rough riders then engaged with the wine cups.

Having questioned the Jew to his satisfaction, the leader of the band took a seat at a table in the corner of the back room, and wine and solid food were placed before him.

He then removed his mask and Tornay recognized the grim leader of the Ravens, although the man had changed his appearance very much since their last meeting.

At a signal from the leader the boyish observer took a seat at the table near him, the youth removing his mask also to eat and drink.

A few covert glances at the darkish youth only were sufficient for the keen-eyed American.

"A very clever disguise, indeed," he said to himself, "but you won't pass with me, Maria Fouchard. I hope the scale will fall from poor Fallon's eyes now, and it will be well."

Tornay had then rested his head on his hands, as if very weary, yawning the while.

"Do you ride on soon, Father Abraham?" inquired the leader.

"When my jaded horse is refreshed, monsieur."

"Father Abraham," cried the man whom the disguised girl addressed as Monsieur Lally, "can you handle that sword you wear under your cloak?"

"My arm is feeble, monsieur, but I learned to fence when I served in the army in my youth."

"In what army?"

"The Polish army, monsieur."

"Then you are a Pole?"

"I was born in Poland, but I am a citizen of the world now."

"The old crow may be worth the plucking," whispered the artful girl to her promised husband.

"I think he is, and I will see to it."

It is a blessing to have keen ears at times, and young Tornay was thus endowed to an extraordinary degree, as he heard every syllable of the whispered words.

Having finished his supper, the leader of the Ravens went out among his followers and gave whispered directions to some of them, leaving Maria in the back room.

The pretended Jew was again resting his head on his hands as if dozing.

Two of the robbers went back to the stable; and one of them rushed into the back room soon after, crying:

"Brave captain, the black horse stolen from you is in the stable here."

"Say you so, knave, and are you certain?" cried the captain, as he glared savagely at the Jew.

"I'll swear to it by all the saints, captain. That boy outside says that dog of a Jew there rode the horse here."

The accused man sprang up from his chair as if in great terror, protesting:

"Holy Father Abraham protect me, but I vow I bought the good steed honestly in Paris."

Two of the robbers sprang at the disguised youth, who had shuffled to the open window, when he turned suddenly on them and drew his sword.

"Vile robbers!" he hissed, "this is but a plot to rob the poor Jew, but even the rat will fight when cornered. Feel my teeth now."

Out went the youth's sword in rapid thrusts, and the two robbers fell with deathly cries.

Then out through the window darted the pretended Jew, as he cried:

"I will slay more of you ere you rob me, you vile dogs!"

"After the dog!" yelled the leader of the band, as he dashed to the back door. "To the stable and secure his horse. He is in there."

Tornay had darted into the stable, banging the door after him.

Captain Lally dashed out at the back of the stable with his followers, but they could not catch a glimpse of the Jew or the black horse.

While they were all staring around in the gloom a horseman dashed along the road from Paris, and a squeakish voice yelled out:

"Captain, captain, three riders are coming this way in haste."

"Our expected friends," responded the captain. "Let the Jewish dog go for the present."

Tornay was then standing in a little grove with his comrades and the stable boy, the latter holding the three horses.

They could hear the dwarf shouting outside, and then the robbers retreating to the tavern.

"The dwarf is faithful," said Tornay; "but who can the three riders be?"

"Some travelers from Paris. There they come now, and the robbers ride to meet them," answered young Fallon.

"Good boy," said Tornay, "go in and see if the road is clear to the north. I will give you another silver piece when you return, and be silent about us."

The stable boy ran away to the tavern, and the young guardsmen listened for a struggle on the road.

No sound of strife could be heard, however, but they soon perceived the band riding back to the tavern again at full speed.

"The three riders are friends," remarked Tornay, "and they bring tidings to the Ravens."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STRANGER FROM PARIS.

When Captain Lally and his men rode forth to meet the three riders, Maria Fouchard remained in the back room of the tavern.

"That old Jew puzzles me," the crafty girl muttered, "and it was wonderful to see how he used his sword. I will watch here."

She then perceived the stable boy stealing along cautiously; and she was seated at the table when he entered the back room.

"That boy knows where the Jew is," the girl said to herself, "and I'll watch him."

The stable boy went out to the front door and looked along the road to the north, when he could hear the masked riders galloping back again from the south.

He then slipped into the hallway; and one of the strange horsemen walked into the tavern with Captain Lally, and they both entered the back room.

The stranger wore a mask also; and he carried himself with a very haughty air.

"But I tell you, fool," he said to Captain Lally, "that the three cubs rode this way together over two hours ago. We tracked them through every town and village."

"And you say one of them was disguised as an old Jew, count," responded Lally.

"Yes, yes. I only discovered so much three hours after they had departed, when I mounted and rode at full speed to warn you."

"Perdition seize me," groaned the bandit, "but that young fiend called Tornay must have been the old Jew."

"One word with you, captain," interrupted Maria, who had resumed the mask.

"Well, Martin?"

"I believe those you seek are hiding back of the stable there. Send some of your men to guard the northern road."

"Ah, Maria," said the stranger, "I recognize your charming voice."

"Not when I please to disguise it, count. Captain Lally, I will steal out here to spy a little, and do not ride away until I return."

"Very well, dear friend."

The crafty girl was stealing along beside a hedge, and making her way to the grove, where the three guardsmen were consulting with the stable boy.

Close after the disguised girl crept a small figure.

Maria Fouchard only stole into the grove far enough to

hear the voices of the young guardsmen, when she retreated to the tavern.

"Can you not guide us to some side road back there, boy?" asked Tornay, as he gave the lad a piece of silver.

"Yes, monsieur, and willingly."

"Dismiss the boy and come here, Monsieur Tarquin," a squeaking voice behind them was heard to say. "Be quick, as danger presses."

Tornay told the stable boy to get away and to keep silent, and the dwarf was heard again, saying:

"Leave your jaded horses there and follow me in haste if you would again baffle the Ravens of the Forest."

Tornay motioned to his friends to follow as he hastened to the right after the dwarf, who was soon running swiftly.

The little fellow led them along the grove, and then out toward the road on the north of the tavern.

Another high hedge ran along the side of the road, and Gamut motioned to the young guardsmen to stoop behind it.

The dwarf then explained, with rapid speech, his project for the escape of the three friends; and Tornay highly approved of it.

"The steeds nearest to you, remember," said the strange little fellow, as he stole away along the hedge toward the tavern, "and your sword must cut a way through the six Ravens along the road."

"We'll cut through them, good Gamut."

The Ravens were then stealing up to the grove, led on by Maria.

The stranger from Paris was engaged over his supper in the back room.

At a signal from the dwarf, who was watching the horses outside, the three young guardsmen stole along inside the hedge, when they darted out suddenly and sprang on the three horses nearest to them, when they sent the others scamp-ering along the road to Paris.

"Thieves! robbers!" yelled the dwarf, as he ran after the three friends. "Ravens, the Jew is off with our best horses."

The stranger dashed out to the front of the tavern on hearing the alarm, when he saw the three riders galloping away on the northern road.

"Baffled again!" he cried. "But Lally has six riders along the road. Bah! what avail will so many be against those daring young demons."

The three young guardsmen dashed on together, with their swords and pistols ready.

"Good steeds in truth!" remarked Tornay. "No parleying with the vultures ahead, friends."

"We will dash through them like a whirlwind," responded the dashing youth who admired Maria so much.

"But we must disable them all," quietly suggested the stout youth.

"That is understood," consented Tornay. "One pistol shot from each of us, and then at the others with the swords. What of the dwarf now, skeptic?"

"He is the prince of dwarfs," Fallon impulsively answered, "and I will treasure him in my inmost soul hereafter."

The dauntless youths rode on for over two miles, when they drew near the edge of a wood.

"Watch for them now," cautioned Tornay, "but spur on the faster."

Then out ahead of them from the trees rode six horsemen to block the road, one of them crying:

"Halt, riders!"

The only answer was a volley from the guardsmen's pistols, and three of the robbers fell.

The others turned as if to retreat into the wood, when the young friends closed on them with the swords.

"Death to the vultures," yelled Fallon, as he struck one of the robbers from the saddle.

"Give Captain Lally the old Jew's compliments," cried Tornay, as he cut another of the band through the mask, inflicting a fearful gash, "and we thank him for the good steeds."

The stout young guardsman did not utter a word as he disposed of his second victim.

Then on dashed the dauntless youths, with a clear road before them—for some distance at least.

"Where will we halt next, captain?" inquired young Fallon, as they drew up a little.

"At Mosbay, if our steeds will bear us so far with speed, and they are good ones."

"How far may that be?"

"Fifty miles."

"I will be very hungry," remarked Placide, "but I will enjoy a good dinner."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GIRL AND THE DWARF.

The young champions were very fortunate so far; and they rode in safety until they reached the large village of Mosbay, where they encountered a serious setback.

The village was situated on the bank of a deep, swift river, and the only bridge within several miles on either side had been swept away by a resistless flood on the previous night.

All the boats in the neighborhood had been swept down to the sea also, and no one would venture to cross the foaming current on a raft.

So much did the young guardsmen learn within the first hour of their arrival at the village.

The travelers had changed their disguises soon after their last encounter with the Ravens, and they entered Mosbay dressed as three young students on their way to Strasburg.

After dining and consulting together they resolved to try a scheme for throwing their enemies off the trail, and they mounted their weary horses again, telling the people of the small hotel where they stopped that they would push down with the stream in the hope of finding a means of crossing the water with their horses.

On leaving the village the young guardsmen skirted around the place and pushed up the bank for a few miles until they struck on a small country tavern.

"We must rest here," said Tornay, "and our good steeds need it much."

After seeing that their horses were properly cared for, the weary travelers retired to rest, warning the landlord to arouse them on the approach of any suspicious strangers from the direction of the village.

After sleeping about four hours, Tornay arose again, partook of some supper, and then hired an old saddle horse to pay a visit to the village.

The young American had supplied himself with materials for disguises before leaving Versailles; and he soon rigged himself up as an old farmer, having borrowed a suitable coat and a hat from the landlord.

Placing the casket under Placide's pillow with a note on his breast also, Tornay started from the tavern, muttering:

"The good lads are worn out, and I will let them rest well. Now to see if any of the vultures are on our track yet."

It was early in the evening when the youth reached the

village, and he stopped at a few of the stores to make some purchases and cautious inquiries as well.

And then he made a discovery.

"Yes," answered a fair dame at one of the stores, "two travelers arrived at the hotel about three hours ago, and one of them was a dwarf with very red hair."

The good dame described the other traveler also.

"Maria Fouchard and Gamut together," muttered Tornay, as he made his way to the hotel. "What can the crafty girl be at now? She has the endurance of a backwoodsman."

Tornay strolled into the hotel and called for wine, retiring to the sitting room at the rear.

Then he perceived Gamut and the disguised girl seated at a table, with their heads resting on their breasts, as if sound asleep.

Pretending to be interested in the appearance of the uncouth dwarf, Tornay asked the waiter if the sleepers were traveling mountebanks.

"I suppose so," was the reply, "but they ride very good horses. They insist on crossing the river when the animals have rested."

"But how are they to cross?" asked Tornay.

"The one with the dark skin declares that he will swim his horse across, and the dwarf vows he will follow him."

The conversation was interrupted by the clattering of hoofs along the street, and a strong party rode down to halt at the hotel.

"The Ravens are swooping again," muttered Tornay, "and they have called on fresh birds."

Yes, the Ravens had filled up the ranks again, as fully fifteen well-mounted armed men stopped at the hotel with Captain Lally.

The disguised girl was on her feet at the first sound of the clattering hoofs, and she hastened out to meet the leader.

"You are late, I fear," she said, "but we can head them off yet if we are venturesome."

Maria then explained about the flood and the arrival of the young guardsmen.

"They went down the river," she continued, "to seek a bridge twenty miles below, but we can cut them off on the main road beyond if we cross here at once."

"What! Attempt to cross the flooded river on horseback? You are mad, Martin."

"So Gamut said, but I would venture it in such a quest."

"Gamut is wise; and where is he?"

"Back here—asleep."

The dwarf was not asleep, as he was at that moment making significant signs to Tornay in the back room.

Captain Lally gave a few orders to the landlord before retreating to the sitting-room with the disguised girl, and they both cast careless glances at the pretended old farmer.

The dwarf opened his eyes when the leader gave him a sharp slap on the shoulder.

"Have you rested enough, my champion?" cried the big man.

"Yes, captain, if you have work to do."

And dwarf shook himself as if to banish all thoughts of sleep.

None of the Ravens had their masks on when they rode into the village, and they were all equipped as the retainers of some rich nobleman.

Captain Lally then entered into a discussion with the dwarf as to the best means of crossing the flooded river, and Maria disappeared.

Yet the crafty creature kept her eyes on those in the sitting-room, and on the old farmer in particular.

Captain Lally soon decided that it would be best to ride

up along the banks of the swollen river to the nearest bridge, and then strike across for the main road to Strasburg.

"Thanks to friends along the route," he said, "we have good fresh steeds, and we will cut the crows off."

Maria then appeared at a side door and made a signal to Captain Lally and the dwarf, who followed her into a hallway.

"Can that fiend of a girl have detected me?" muttered Tornay, who had noted the movement. "It must be so, and I will take heed."

The pretended old farmer walked out into the front room in a leisurely manner, and he stood at the door a moment as if to admire the good steeds taking water in the side yard.

One splendid animal stood in front of the hotel in charge of a stout fellow, and Tornay was admiring the beautiful creature when some one rushed by him, muttering:

"Fly at once!"

The warning was given by the dwarf, as he passed out into the side yard to give some orders to the busy Ravens.

Tornay walked leisurely over to the side of the restive steed and patted the animal on the shoulder as he remarked:

"What a magnificent charger, and he is fit for the king."

"Hands off, old knave," cried the soldier who held the horse.

Tornay could then perceive several of the Ravens drawing their swords and making a movement as if about to charge at him.

"This horse is mine," he cried, as he struck the soldier a rattling blow with his feet, springing on the fiery steed the next instant.

The armed man fell to the ground as if stunned, releasing his grasp on the bridle; and down the street dashed the horse and his dauntless rider, while yells of rage and amazement arose from the Ravens in the side yard.

Little Gamut was one of the first to vault on a horse and dash along in pursuit, as he squeaked out:

"It is one of the crows we are after. Mount in haste and pursue the fiend!"

The Ravens did mount in haste, Captain Lally and the disguised girl dashing out to spring on two of the best steeds at their disposal.

Tornay rode on through the village at full speed, and then down along a bank of the river toward a wood.

"So much gained by that adventure," he chuckled, as he looked back at Gamut. "The little fellow is a treasure, and that girl is a real vulture."

On gaining the wood the young American wheeled to the left and skirted the village once more, but he did not press the good horse too much.

"Get our horses ready," he cried to the landlord, as he rode up to the little tavern, "and keep the stout hack I rode here until we return."

Ten minutes after the young guardsmen were on the road again, pressing up the river bank.

They had not proceeded more than a mile when the American looked back eagerly.

"We have the Ravens after us again," he cried, "and press on, comrades. We'll soon cross the river if we have to swim for it."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE FOAMING RIVER.

The Ravens were in full pursuit again, and it was the cunning girl who led them on the straight route after the young guardsmen.

Henri Tornay had not yet said a word to his comrades about

the appearance of the wily girl in her boyish disguise, as he did not care to pain Clarence Fallon thus far by exposing the girl's perfidy.

When riding along the river bank, however, the young American felt that it was his duty to confide fully in his friends.

Tornay had heard of the project put forth by the daring girl to Captain Lally, in order to cross the flooded river, and he was pondering over it when they discovered their foes in pursuit again.

On seeing their foes behind them, the young guardsmen wheeled into the high road running along near the bank of the river, the young American riding between the others.

He then told them in loud tones about Maria's appearance at the first stopping place and at the hotel in the last village, and he kept crying out so that the others could not miss a word:

"The girl discovered me at the hotel, and she it was who set the Ravens at me."

The young American then looked back at their pursuers.

Clarence Fallon was astounded.

"I cannot believe it," he cried, in passionate tones.

"Brave comrades," Tornay cried, "what say you if we face the flood?"

"To the river with us, I cry," responded the desperate Fallon.

"Then down to this jutting bank with us, brave comrades," cried Tornay.

The guardsmen forced their horses into the rushing torrent.

The pursuers were then about half a mile behind.

"Mercy on us," cried the girl, "but they are facing to the river; and you said it would be madness to make the venture."

"Fools, fools!" yelled the leader of the Ravens, as he spurred furiously toward the river. "They will all be swept down to destruction, and the precious casket is lost to us forever."

"Follow me, brave girl," cried Clarence Fallon, "if you wish to perish with me in the tide."

Maria plunged her horse into the rushing stream an instant after.

"I will die with you, Clarence," she yelled, "and it is to save you I am here."

Then in plunged the dwarf, muttering:

"I will follow the beloved one through water or fire, but she must not betray the wizard."

All the other Ravens dashed along the bank, not one of them daring to venture into the rushing flood.

Henri Tornay slipped from his horse's back when well out in the rushing stream, and he faced the animal's head toward the further shore as he kept grasping the bridle and the stirrup.

"Face out, face out, comrades!" he yelled, as he gazed back, "and strike on the current near the other bank."

"Save yourself, brave Tornay!" yelled Clarence Fallon, "and do not heed us. Ha, false maid, and we will die together now."

"I am not false, fool!" she answered, "as I have come this way to save you."

"By setting the Ravens on us."

"By pretending to do so, that I may baffle them in the end. That suspicious wretch outside has poisoned your mind against me."

Tornay was working the good horse toward the left bank, and Placide was keeping fairly in the same course.

Fallon and the girl were out in the middle of the stream, with the dwarf close behind them.

The Ravens were then shut out from observation by a bend of the river, yet they kept galloping on down the left bank.

On and on swept the five riders, Tornay and his stout comrade edging well to the shore, while the others still kept out near the middle of the stream.

Peering ahead, the young American perceived a low, jutting bank, and he urged his steed still more to the right.

"Make for that bank, comrades," he cried, "and we will be saved!"

Tornay mounted his horse again and spurred him on to strike the jutting bank, while he yelled to the others to make another effort.

The young American's steed struck the welcome bank and bounded up on the sloping side, when the rider sprang from its back to run out to the end of the point, yelling:

"Don't despair, brave comrade, and face to the right bank."

Tornay then turned to find that the stout youth was safe on the jutting bank also, with his dripping horse.

"Dear Fallon," sighed the latter, as he gazed along the rushing flood, "we were children together, and he had a noble soul."

"Let us hope," rejoined Tornay, in cheerful tones, "that he will be saved yet. Now we must back to the high road and then on to Strasburg."

About an hour after midnight the young guardsmen drew up at another village tavern some fifty miles beyond that flooded river, and in less than half an hour after riders and horses were enjoying a well-earned rest.

An hour afterward two more riders made their appearance.

One of the riders dismounted quietly and entered the side door of the tavern, the other muttering:

"It is all very well to secure the gems, but the wizard must not be slain. Yes, the adored creature will be my fair bride yet."

"They are here," said the dismounted rider, as she appeared to the other again, "and they are both sleeping soundly, good Gamut. Dismount and feed the horses, and I will secure the casket."

Maria Fouchard and the dwarf had escaped from the flooded river, and the wily girl was after the precious casket again.

Cautious as he was, Henri Tornay retired to rest well satisfied that the pursuing Ravens could not come up with them for several hours.

Little Gamut led the weary horses into the stable.

As the little fellow was feeding the horses, Maria appeared in the stable with food and wine for him, and she remarked:

"I have discovered that they are sleeping in the same room but separate beds. The door is locked on the inside, yet I will gain admittance with this ladder here."

They seized a ladder, which was used to ascend to the loft of the stable, and placed it outside the window where the wearied young guardsmen were sleeping.

"I will in for refreshment now," said the crafty girl, "and you eat in the stable, as we must not be tracked hereafter."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WORK OF THE TRAITRESS.

The dwarf was very uneasy as he swallowed the food, and he often moved to the stable door to gaze up at the window where his wizard was sleeping.

A small lamp was burning in the bedroom where the weary youths slept; and the precious casket was under the pillow on which Tornay's head rested.

Maria Fouchard stole up the ladder as silently as a cat, but there was a tigerish expression in her glowing eyes as she peered in at the sleepers before she stealthily raised the window.

Into the room she stole, with her gleaming eyes on the sleeping youth, and she advanced to the bedside with her hands outstretched.

One of the muscular hands held a dagger.

Slowly and surely, as she hoped, Maria drew the casket

from under the pillow, her eyes still fixed on the sleeper, and the dagger upraised to strike a deadly blow.

The dagger arm was then suddenly seized from behind, and she was quietly dragged back to the window by the dwarf, who hissed into her ear:

"Would you sacrifice so much treasure to gratify your hatred?"

Gamut forced the vengeful creature out to the ladder, and she then clasped the precious casket under her arm.

The dwarf lowered the window before descending after her, and they both reached the stable without creating the least alarm.

"Now for the best horses, dear Gamut," ordered the tireless creature.

"That is a happy suggestion, fair one. Did you bribe them inside to keep silent about you?"

"I made sure of that. Let us take a side road and return, and then we will avoid Captain Lally and his Ravens."

"Too late, too late!" squeaked the dwarf, as he ran to the stable door and bent his ear to listen, "as I fear they are coming now."

The wily girl turned into the stable to hide the casket, and the Ravens were drawing up in front of the tavern when she spoke to the dwarf again.

"Now, dear Gamut," she said, "you must let your wizard take his chance, and remember that we have just arrived here."

The dwarf only nodded in reply, but he said to himself:

"I will protect you and secure the casket, but I will befriend the wizard."

Maria went out in front to hail her friends, leaving the dwarf as if yet tending to the roses."

Tornay and his comrade were still sleeping soundly when a small heavy substance went crashing in through the window, and it struck the bedpost over the young American to fall on his head.

The shock aroused the vigilant youth on the instant, and he sprang out of the bed with his sword clasped.

He then bent his ear to listen, when he could hear the stamping and neighing of the hungry steeds in front.

Putting the pistol in his belt, Tornay shook his friend roughly.

"Arouse," he hissed into the slumberer's ear, "as the Ravens are on us again."

Placide was then looking out of the window on the stable yard.

"The Ravens are out here," responded the stout youth, "and they have discovered our horses."

"The casket, the casket!" groaned Tornay, as he examined the door. "What fiend could have entered here while we slept?"

"Have courage, man, and we will recover it again, I pledge you. Let us barricade the door, as the Ravens will soon be up."

Loud voices were then heard in the hallway below.

"Where are the young thieves who stole my horses, dog of a landlord?" cried Captain Lally.

"They are sleeping in the back room first door above, monsieur," answered the frightened landlord.

"Up with us, Ravens, and in on the bandits before they awaken."

Tornay had then recovered a little from the shock he had received, and he was assisting Placide in barricading the bedroom door.

"Open and surrender, robber dogs," yelled Captain Lally, "or we will roast you alive."

The young guardsmen did not answer.

Tornay was then peeping out at the side of the window, and Placide kept guard near the barricade. The young American could see about six of the Ravens in the yard below the window, and they all held swords and pistols ready."

He also caught a glimpse of the dwarf, who was standing at the stable door, crying aloud:

"The wizard is trapped at last."

Those outside the bedroom door flung themselves against it in vain.

The young guardsmen remained silent.

Tornay left the window and stole over to Placide, whispering:

"We will out by the window, as only four of the rascals are below."

"As you say, comrade."

The young guardsman stole to the window and silently raised it, having blown out the lamp.

Then they took deliberate aim at the masked Ravens and fired.

Their two victims fell groaning to the ground; and Tornay dropped below the window through the smoke from the large pistols, landing lightly on his feet.

Placide followed, but the stout youth went over on his back; and one of the robbers rushed at him with uplifted sword, yelling:

"I'll cleave this crow."

"Not yet," answered the stout youth, who still grasped his sword as he raised himself to a sitting posture.

The Raven's weapon descended only to glance aside on the stout guardsman's steel, and the youth regained his feet as he plunged upward into the rascal's breast.

Tornay had then slain the fourth robber; but the two armed men summoned to the stable by the dwarf were rushing out at them.

"With swords only," said Tornay, as he dashed at one of the Ravens before the fellow had time to aim a pistol.

Placide rushed at the other robber with equal activity, saying:

"Two more of the vultures doomed."

The robbers thus attacked defended themselves in a desperate manner, as they attempted to retreat to the stable, but they were stricken down near the open door, just as their companions in the tavern rushed out to see the dauntless young guardsmen dashing into the stable, banging the door to after them.

The clashing of weapons could then be heard inside the stable for an instant, followed by a squeaky voice, imploring:

"In mercy, spare my life, good wizard, and I will be your slave hereafter."

CHAPTER XVIII.

TOGETHER AGAIN.

A lantern was burning in the stable when the young guardsmen rushed in, and it was the dwarf who banged the door after them, dropping a heavy bar across it.

The cunning little rascal then struck at Tornay with his sword.

"Disarm me," he hissed, "and then order me up into the loft."

Then arose the dwarf's cry for mercy, and his voice was drowned by a furious clattering on the stable door.

"Up that ladder with you, little imp!" cried Tornay, "and take the lantern."

"I obey—I obey, good wizard!" yelled the cunning little fellow, "and only spare me."

Gamut darted up the ladder to the spacious loft, and the young guardsman followed.

"Draw up the ladder," whispered the little fellow, as he put the lantern aside and seized the top rung.

"What of Clarence Fallon?" eagerly demanded Placide, as they were drawing up the ladder.

"Alas, monsieur," answered Gamut, "your handsome young friend was swept down before us as we struck on the right bank."

"Did you see him perish?"

"No, monsieur, but he was carried away in the middle of the river as he yelled back his devotion to Maria."

"Then that girl is here?" demanded Tornay.

"We arrived here about an hour ago, good wizard," was the honest answer.

"Then she has the casket. Confess, you little demon, or I'll——"

"Yes, yes, good wizard. Maria has the casket now. I cannot lie to you."

"How did she enter our room?"

"By the window, good——"

"They have burst in the door below," interrupted Placide, "and they are calling for lights."

"One question more, little imp. Did Maria give the casket to Captain Lally?"

"No, no! She intends to keep it for herself."

"I thought as much, and it is well."

Torches were then burning below in the stable.

"Come down and surrender, you dogs!" yelled Captain Lally.

"Come up and take us if you dare, you cowardly vulture!" retorted Tornay.

"Out with the horses!" yelled the leader of the Ravens, "and we'll burn the crows alive."

"And the jewels will be lost in the ashes," yelled Tornay.

"You are a great wizard," muttered the dwarf, "and you will baffle them all, but you will not injure fair Maria."

"No, and she will be your wife."

As if intending to carry out the threat, all the horses were led out of the building and to the front of the tavern.

"Are you mad, captain?" cried Maria Fouchard, as she seized Captain Lally's arm while he stood in the yard, "to burn up Gamut and the casket."

Little Gamut was then moving around the extensive loft, the ceiling of which was very low.

He soon discovered a small trap at the back, which led out on the slanting roof.

"This way," he said to Placide, as Gamut moved back to raise the trap.

They then crawled out on the slanting roof, where they could not be perceived by their enemies in front.

Dropping singly to the ground, they stole away to a small field of wheat, Gamut leading the way.

After pushing their way through the wheat field, the young guardsmen found themselves near the high road on which they had traveled to the tavern, when they perceived a horseman approaching.

"That's dear Clarence," exclaimed Placide, as he darted along inside the fence to meet the horseman, followed by the others.

Clarence turned his horse over to the dwarf, and stretched himself in the thick wheat, while he gave his comrades a brief but thrilling account of his almost miraculous escape from the river.

Then Tornay explained the situation to the love-stricken youth, dwelling a little on the point of Maria's swearing to become the dwarf's bride.

"Ten thousand fiends," exclaimed Fallon, "I cannot believe it. If she has the casket, she will give it to me."

"As a wedding present," remarked Placide, with a chuckle.

The young American pondered only a few minutes when he led the others back through the wheat, leaving the tired horse to feed away in peace.

They came to a halt at the corner of the field, still keeping in its shelter.

"Now, comrades," said the young American, "we must strike a crushing blow at the vultures."

CHAPTER XIX.

HER WILY WAYS.

The leader of the Ravens was in a fearful frame of mind when the wily girl appealed to him regarding his setting the stable on fire.

He then entered the stable with three of his followers to yell up at the young guardsmen, who did not answer.

"What infernal trick are the young dogs planning now?" savagely growled the baffled leader.

The savage rascal yelled to those above again, and he added:

"Come down, you crows, or I'll burn you out of your roost."

As if the threat was put into execution at the utterance, some hay and straw at the back of the stable blazed up furiously, and Maria Fouchard ran out of the place yelling:

"The torch has set the stable on fire. Come out, Gamut, or you will perish."

Captain Lally and his men fled from the flames, but they watched the little window over the door.

"They must have escaped by the trap door to the roof," suggested the landlord, as he hastened into the stable with a bucket of water.

"A fearful volley of imprecations burst from Captain Lally as he dashed around to the back of the stable with some of his followers.

"Torches, torches, this way," the baffled leader cried, as he bent his eyes to the ground. "The fiends take them as here are their footmarks, and they have forced Gamut with them."

Calling all his men together in front of the tavern, Captain Lally ordered them to mount in haste, when he led them to the wheatfield.

Maria Fouchard was then sitting in the back room of the tavern looking out at the landlord and his wife putting out the fire, when she heard a soft footstep behind her.

"Gamut!" she exclaimed, as she turned to behold the dwarf.

"I stole away from them back in the wheat field, my adored one. Where is the casket?"

"It is safe. I was thinking how I could break away from Captain Lally."

"Your horses are secured to the fence out there at the side, and they are all saddled. Let us take the best and ride away, while he is engaged in hunting the young crows, my beloved one."

The girl ran over to the large fire-place and drew the casket from behind a large slab, to place it under her cloak.

"Perfidious, perjured girl!" cried Clarence Fallon, as he dashed in from the hallway to seize her by the throat.

Tornay sprang in to seize the creature also, and Placide grasped the casket and dragged it from under her arm.

"Don't injure my sweet bride!" squeaked the dwarf, as he seized Fallon's arms and dragged him away from the girl. "I hear the Ravens riding this way again, good wizard."

"Secure the doors then!" cried Tornay, as he placed the casket under his cloak.

Maria Fouchard sank on a chair as if stunned or overwhelmed by the surprise.

"You cannot baffle the wizard, my dear," he said, "and I warned you. Cheer up, and I'll make a lady of you, as I am rich."

"You horrid beast, get away!" groaned the wily girl.

"To action!" ordered Tornay, "and let us give the vile vultures a last shock. Up with the girl to the front, as the rascals will soon be outside."

After his men had dashed to and fro in the wheat field for some time without finding the young guardsmen, Captain Lally gave orders to return to the tavern again.

As the Ravens rode back to the tavern their leader soon discovered that the horses left at the fence had disappeared.

"May the fiends seize the dogs," he yelled, "if they have not tricked us again and made off with the horses. You dog of a landlord, why are your front doors closed?"

"I did not close them, monsieur," cried the man from the back yard.

"Then who did?"

"We did, vile vulture," cried a voice from the upper window, "and blaze away, comrades."

Three pistols shots flashed out from the upper windows, and two of the Ravens fell, the others falling into the utmost confusion.

The three young guardsmen fired again, and as many of the robbers reeled in their saddles.

"Retreat! retreat!" yelled the leader, as he spurred his horse and faced back the road. "We are struggling against fiends."

Four of the band only swept on after their leader, and the others were at the mercy of the victors.

Maria and Gamut stood back in the room as the brief contest was going on.

Tornay was then looking out of the window at the retreating Ravens.

"Brave comrades," he remarked, "I think we can ride on to Strasburg in safety now."

"I must have a few hours rest," said Clarence Fallon.

"To rest, comrades, and I will keep watch," cried the young American. "Gamut, I will leave your promised bride in your charge for the present."

CHAPTER XX.

THE MASTER OF THE RAVENS.

"I charge that little deformed imp with the blackest treachery to me and to the Ravens of the Forest."

It was Maria Fouchard who thus denounced Gamut before a large gathering of the Ravens in another deep cave in the forest.

Two weeks had elapsed since the last defeat of the band by the dauntless three guardsmen, and the girl had returned to her home with the dwarf.

"What have you to say to the charge, prisoner?" demanded the judge.

"The wizard bewitched me," answered Gamut, in candid tones, "and I was compelled to obey him while under his influence."

"Then you confess, miserable imp, that you acted as a traitor to the Ravens of the Forest?"

"I have to confess, captain, that I was compelled to obey the young man known as Monsieur Tornay while in his presence."

"Heat the claws and the traitor will be tortured as he deserves. Thirteen will do."

Thirteen of the Ravens sprang to the side of the cave to seize the ugly iron claws, and a bright wood fire was already blazing in a huge fire-place at one end.

"Some of you," said Captain Lally, "are new recruits in the band, but you are all aware that we are the secret servants of a powerful nobleman, who will richly reward us if we succeed

in carrying out his designs. I will now hint at a great project on foot.

"You are aware, Ravens," continued the leader, "that we had another great project in hand some weeks ago, and that it failed, owing to the deviltry of three young fiends and the treachery of the little imp who is condemned to the torture."

"The claws are heated, captain," cried one of those who had moved to the fire.

Maria darted forward to grasp one of the long rods, and she was back again facing Gamut with her black, blazing, gleaming eyes.

"Hold, Maria," cried the leader, "as I order that the allotted number perform the execution in the regular form. You are permitted to be one of the thirteen, and you must all claw at the traitor at a signal from me."

"Then I swear that I will have the first claw at the horrid imp," cried the terrible girl, as she took her stand in front of the prisoner, while two of the Ravens were securing him to a large slab near the fire.

An iron ring and a long chain were secured to the slab, and the prisoner was forced to a sitting posture as he was secured.

The leader stood erect with his sword uplifted, as he cried:

"When my sword falls on the table, claw away at the traitor imp, and spare him not."

"Great tidings, great tidings!" screamed a harsh voice, as Mother Fouchard dashed into the cave, her eyes flaring with excitement.

"Peace, mother," cried Maria, "until we finish this accursed traitor."

"Hold there," cried the leader. "What is the news, good mother?"

"The three murderous young guardsmen have arrived at the palace, and the treasure will pass the tavern about midnight."

"When did the young dogs arrive, mother?"

"I know not the day or the hour, but a faithful spy in the palace saw the fat youth, known as Placide, coming from the private reception-room of the foreign queen two hours ago. Prepare to seize the treasure, and we will trap the young crows and the Austrian woman hereafter."

"Death to this traitor first," cried Maria, "and the claws are cooling, captain."

"Then claw at the traitor and make quick work of him."

And the speaker struck the table a furious blow with the sword.

A peculiar cry was sent forth at the instant by a recruit who had attracted the attention of the dwarf.

The thirteen claws were raised against the little prisoner, but not one of them touched Gamut that night.

Maria Fouchard aimed to get the first blow at the little fellow's eyes, and the rod in her hand was foremost in the combined movement, when it was suddenly dashed out of her grasp, and she was hurled back on the floor.

Six of the Ravens who held the red-hot claws made similar attempts on the prisoner, when their rods were dashed aside also, the other six striking at them furiously with the instruments of torture held by them.

Then up sprang the recruit who had claimed attention, and he darted at the astounded leader of the band with a sword raised as he said:

"Death to the vile vultures of the forest! Exterminate the cowardly cravens forever."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE CAVE.

While the daring recruit was thus declaiming, the mask fell from his face.

"I knew the wizard would keep his oath!" yelled Gamut with a joyous shriek.

Two of the six men who had turned on the others with the claws bent down to release the dwarf, who at once seized a burning rod.

Those with the rods then flung aside their masks and sprang to support the recruit, and Gamut darted at the prostrate girl.

Captain Lally was dumfounded at the astounding rupture, and he could scarcely believe his eyesight when he saw six of his men stricken down with the fiery rods.

And he was almost dazed with astonishment when he recognized the recruit who dashed at him with the sword.

That assailant was Henri Tornay.

The fray was then fiercely raging throughout the cave, and more than half of the real Ravens had fallen.

Striking at and slaying or disabling a few of the robbers who stood in his way, Tornay faced the leader at last.

"Now, dog of a robber," cried the young American, "to test your skill with the sword."

Silence then prevailed in the cave, as all the other Ravens had been either slain or disabled, some four or five of them flinging down their arms to beg aloud for mercy.

The swordsmen were about to engage in the warm strife, when a sound of clattering arms was heard in the entrance to the cave, and in rushed Clarence Fallon and Placide, the former crying:

"Are we too late for the final coup? Ah, base Maria, you are subdued at last!"

Then into the cave marched four lines of guardsmen, with a boyish figure in the rear.

That boyish figure stared around at the signs of the late carnage for a few moments, and he then advanced toward Tornay with a white mask covering the face, and exclaimed:

"What is this now, gallant youth? Have you not conquered all the vultures?"

"The queen?" exclaimed Maria. "Oh, who can save men now?"

"I can, my beloved," replied the dwarf, "as the noble lady will sanction our marriage."

The queen withdrew the mask and smiled at the little fellow.

"Noble lady," said Tornay, "I am pledged to engage this wretch with the swords, and I pray that you will permit me."

"Who is the wretch?"

"I know not his real name, but his real countenance I will soon expose. This is the leader of the Ravens, and he wears a false beard under his mask."

"Then at the wretch, my gallant champion, as I have confidence in your valor. Do not slay him, as he must live to expose the traitors who have incited him."

Tornay had not exchanged four passes with his opponent when he became aware he was not dealing with the man whom he had encountered at Mother Fouchard's tavern on the night when the disguised queen appeared there with the casket.

"This fellow," he muttered, "whoever he is, has learned to fence in Italy, or from an Italian master, but I have two or three of old Ballou's points to show him."

Among all the excited spectators of the scene, none appeared more deeply interested than the beautiful queen.

Tornay had succeeded in defending himself, but not without extreme efforts, from all the wily thrusts and cuts made at him, when he suddenly dealt back and with wondrous effect.

The dexterous youth did not thrust after the Italian style, but he slashed away at his opponent's head, crying:

"Your mask must give way, vulture."

And the mask of the Raven did fall to the ground at the third slash, with the mask slit open by the point of the young champion's sword.

"Now for an eye," Tornay cried, "or the false beard that conceals your murderous countenance."

One, two, three slashes were counted on the Raven's sword as the youth struck at him, and the fourth bore away the full flowing beard, leaving a small gash on the robber's nose.

Changing his mode of attack, the young American made some rapid passes and thrusts, as if striving to reach his opponent's breast.

Then followed a skillful feint, and a darting forward of the steel a second after, when the Raven dropped his left hand with a cry of pain, and his face was exposed to all.

The sword point of the young American had passed through the robber's left hand.

All eyes in the large cave were then turned on the countenance thus presented to them.

"Count Pollo!" exclaimed the queen, as she stared at the exposed Raven.

"No, no," yelled Mother Fouchard, as she ran forward to get a better glimpse at the robber's face, "that is not Count Pollo! The vile wretch is the count's half-brother, who was known as Peter Dubois, and he was my first husband. Oh, you vile galley slave, is it thus you return to me when I believed you dead?"

A slight commotion was then heard at the entrance, and three of the guardsmen who had been on duty outside dragged a masked prisoner into the well-lighted apartment.

"Noble lady," cried one of the soldiers, "we caught this masked man prowling outside, and he resisted when we assailed him."

"Off with his mask!" cried the queen, as she turned on the last prisoner.

The mask was torn from the prowler's face, when fresh exclamations of surprise could be heard throughout the cave.

"This is Count Polo without doubt!" cried the queen, as she advanced to glare at the prisoner.

"I am, queen," answered the detected nobleman, as he sank on the ground, "and I am dying. I have conspired against you, and death is my reward."

"Then that wretch, who resembles you so much," demanded the queen, "is your half-brother?"

"He is."

The wounded nobleman gasped for breath as he uttered the words, and he pressed his hands to his left side, moaning forth:

"Fair queen, I deplore that I ever conspired against you, and—and——"

Count Pollo never finished the expression, as his lips were soon closed forever.

"Here dies your uncle, Maria," cried Mother Fouchard, as she glared at the dying man.

"And is that wretch my father?" cried the girl, as she pointed at the captain of the Ravens.

"He is, my dear. Oh, you have noble blood in your veins. I vow to you."

Tornay was then glaring at his late opponent with intense interest.

"When did you return from America?"

"I was never in America."

"What a lie," cried Mother Fouchard. "Base convict, you escaped from the gallows at Marseilles three years ago, and fled to America, from whence you wrote to me. Then came a letter from your friend there, stating that you were dead."

"Well, well, what if I was in America?"

"This much," answered Tornay. "Six months ago, in New York city, you broke into the house of a wealthy merchant, at the hour of midnight, and you stabbed him as he slept."

"Bah! That is a child's story. Yet what if it be true, as the queen will have me put to death in any case?"

"Then you confess to the robbery and the cruel assassination in New York?"

"No, I do not. I know who you are now, young cub, and I will not confess to clear you."

"Then I will compel you, murderous fiend. Now for your eye."

And young Tornay made a thrust at the stubborn assassin.

"Look your last on your wife and child, as I will pick out your eyes in a few moments. Then I will torture you into a full confession."

"Never, you—— Oh, mercy, what agony!"

CHAPTER XXII.

TORNAY'S STORY.

The leader of the Ravens dropped his sword, as he uttered the last exclamation, and he fell on his knees with his right hand clasped to his eyes.

Tornay's weapon had pierced each of the balls in turn, and the robber would never see the light of day again.

"Now, vile assassin," cried the merciless youth, as he stood over his victim, "will you make a full confession of the crime I charge you with?"

"Promise to pardon me in my agony, and I will confess all you wish," to the queen.

"Life will be but a dark world to you hereafter, poor wretch, and I will grant your petition."

"Then I freely confess that I killed that youth's uncle in New York six months ago, where I cunningly arranged to throw the onus of the crime on him."

"Noble lady and gallant comrades," said the youth called Tornay, as he tore away the false beard covering his pale face, my real name is Albert Journay, and I was a lieutenant in the American army six months ago.

"I was an orphan, but I was the sole heir of a noble uncle, who was a rich merchant in the city of New York, and one of the staunchest supporters of our noble Washington.

"At that time I was stationed with my regiment some miles up the North river, and the city of my birth was held by the English.

"One dark evening, assuming a fitting disguise, I made my way through the English lines to pay a secret visit to my dear uncle, and to meet one who was still dearer to me.

"After leaving the young lady that night, at the hour of eleven, I stole to my uncle's residence, getting in the back way, when I was admitted by a faithful negro servant.

"My uncle was then sound asleep, and I did not arouse him, as I intended to remain in the house until the following night.

"Being very weary I retired to my room, and I soon fell into a sound slumber.

"Before daylight dawned I was out through the English lines, and I gained the American camp a few hours later.

"On the following day, and you may judge of my consternation, a report came to the American camp, through one of our

scouts, that my dear uncle was murdered and robbed, and that I was accused of the crime.

"From that moment I gave my time wholly to trailing the murderer, with what success you now know."

The blind Raven and his wife were sent to the Bastille, where they lived in misery for three years, when they were both killed by making a desperate attempt at escaping from the famous prison.

The queen gave Maria her choice of either marrying Gamut or the gallows. Maria consented to the former.

Maria kept her word, and she became the wife of the dwarf, who had accumulated a small fortune before he joined the Ravens.

The young American soon volunteered to serve under General Lafayette in the expedition to America, and his gallant young comrades begged of the queen to procure them permission to accompany their friend across the Atlantic.

And the three dauntless young guardsmen sailed together on a French frigate.

Young Journay and his two friends fought bravely in the great struggle for freedom; and the young Frenchmen returned to serve their beloved queen after the surrender of the English army at Yorktown.

Some three years after, young Journay paid a visit to Paris with his young bride, when they were received by the queen, at Versailles, with the highest honors to be conferred on strangers.

The dark shadows of the terrible Reign of Terror were then hovering over Paris; but it was some years after when the noble queen was sacrificed on the guillotine by the furious revolutionists.

Clarence Fallon and Placide were killed while defending the noble lady at the palace at Versailles during an attack by the Paris mob.

Fair Marie Antoinette was deeply regretted by the best of the French people; and the Americans deplored the death of one who so nobly assisted them in their hour of need.

The queen never discovered the real author of the plot formed for the seizure of the precious casket, but she always suspected that the king's brother was the secret instigator of the Ravens of the Forest.

Next week's issue will contain "A KING AT 16; OR, THE BOY MONARCH OF AN UNKNOWN LAND." By Richard R. Montgomery.

SPECIAL NOTICE. All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 25, 27, 29 to 36, 38 to 40, 42, 43, 47 to 51, 53 to 55, 57 to 60, 62, 64, 66 to 69, 71 to 73, 75, 81, 84 to 86, 88, 89, 92 to 94, 99, 100, 102, 105, 107, 109 to 111, 116, 119, 124 to 126, 132, 140, 143, 163, 166, 171, 179 to 181, 192, 212, 213, 215, 216, 233, 239, 247, 257, 265, 268, 277. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order by return mail.

AN IRON-BOUND KEG

OR

THE ERROR THAT COST A LIFE

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG

(CHAPTER IV—Continued)

"What occasioned it? Drugs—a blow?"

"Neither, that I can see."

"Then it must be in his blood?"

"That is my candid opinion, sir."

"Poor Jim. I wondered what happened to bring it on?"

"If it is hereditary, sir, he should have felt the gradual approach of the malady. Didn't he ever say anything to you about it?"

"Never. I know his whole history. There is no lunacy in his family that I know of."

"It is very strange then. But he is certainly crazy."

"I wish Ned Riggs would come in. He was the last one I know of who was in Jim's company. He perhaps might enlighten us about this calamity."

The chief had hardly given utterance to this wish when the man he wanted came hurriedly in.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, with a start of surprise as his glance fell upon Jim O'Hare. "Hello, Jim, did you finish your work and get back before me?"

The old detective vouchsafed no reply.

Then Ned glanced at the others and was upon the point of speaking, when he noticed the peculiarity of their actions, and the words froze on his lips.

He stood staring at them in silent amazement, not unmixed with alarm and curiosity—that fatal sentiment which had cost Jim O'Hare so dearly.

The chief observed how embarrassed he was, and said in grave tones:

"I am glad to see you, Ned. I was just saying that I was anxious to have a talk with you."

"Why," said the young man, "what is the matter?"

"Jim O'Hare is stark mad."

"What! Crazy? Impossible!"

"He is completely out of his mind."

"In Heaven's name, what ails him?"

"Nobody knows. He was just brought here insane."

"But what has unbalanced his mind?"

"That is a mystery. Excepting that his clothing is discolored and dirty, he bears no sign of violence except a tiny scratch on his wrist."

"But he was all right when he left me, sir."

"And that is what I wanted to speak to you about."

"Has he met with foul play, inspector?"

"He don't appear to. Where did you leave him last?"

"On the corner of Allen and Grand streets."

"Did he act queerly when you left him?"

"Not in the least. He said he was going to find Bank Note Bill, the bank sneak, in a dive in Hester street. The place must have been near Allen, else he would not have gone so far with me."

"Did you observe what street he went through?"

"Yes, it was Allen street."

"Well, if he met with any rough treatment, it must have occurred after he had left you then, at ten o'clock."

"Undoubtedly. Are you sure he is a lunatic?"

"The doctor says he is. Try him yourself."

Ned walked up to the old detective, seized his hand, shook it, and said, as he glanced in his face:

"Hello, Jim, I see you've got back."

The demented man did not reply.

He did not even glance at the young detective.

A look of compassion crossed Ned's face, for he saw by the look on the old detective's countenance that he was bereft of his reason.

But what occasioned it?

There was no knowing.

"It is no use. He's as mad as a March hare," said Ned.

"Well," replied the chief, "I will keep him here, as he has no family or relations, and let the doctor watch him. He may come around all right after awhile. If he doesn't I'll have to have him committed to the insane asylum."

The policeman then took his departure.

"Poor fellow," said Ned, pityingly. "He was so full of hope when he left me. Did you search him?"

"Thoroughly," said the inspector. "His revolver is gone and his valuables are all safe. His handcuffs are fastened by one bracelet to his right wrist, and he walks as if one of his ankles is sprained a trifle."

"That seems to be a pretty sure indication that he was crazed while he was at work on Bank Note Bill," said Ned. "Perhaps the burglar did something to him to cause this misfortune."

"Well, he hasn't got his man, Ned, and when you are through with your case you can take up the hunt where the poor old fellow had to leave off. Now, doctor, you will please take charge of him."

The surgeon nodded, and seizing hold of the arm of the veteran detective he led him out of the office.

Jim O'Hare docilely accompanied the physician.

He had no mind left.

All was a blank to him.

He was a maniac to all intents and purposes, and despite his idiocy he was perfectly conscious of all that was transpiring, yet helpless to act otherwise.

The evil hunchback's threat had been fearfully kept, for all the doctors in the land would pronounce the old detective insane if they saw him.

Left alone with the chief, Ned Riggs exclaimed:

"I have almost accomplished my purpose, inspector."

"What! Have you arrested the counterfeiters you went for?"

"Not yet. But I have located the gang."

"And they are in the Allen street garret?"

"Yes. I have discovered a secret of theirs."

"What is it?"

"In the first place, they are a regularly organized gang."

"And I imagined it was but one man."

"So you said. But there are a dozen of them."

"That is strange. No one ever saw so many go into the house."

"True. But that is where their secret comes in."

"What secret do you refer to, Ned?"

"The means they have of coming and going."

"Ah! Yes—I see."

"And their mode of receiving the stuff to make the money."

"But what is the secret, Ned?"

"Why, they come from the East river in a boat."

"A boat—up through the city?"

"Straight—through the sewer mains."

"By jove! You don't say!"

"I went there to-night, and saw several of the men come down from the attic. They quietly went down into the cellar, and I saw them go through a door that led into the sewer. There they entered a row-boat, and disappeared from my view."

"What brought you back here just now?"

"I wanted your advice. The whole gang can be caught up in the garret in a bunch if we wait, or we can secure several at a time by watching the sewer for them. I want to know which plan you approve of most, as we are sure of convicting them."

"Are you positive of gaining proof enough to railroad them?"

"Certain of it. The garret contains a complete lay-out of dies, molds, furnace, crucibles, metals and stamps for coins, and presses, inks, paper and registering stamps for bank-notes. Every one of the men can be identified by witnesses, and the whole game lies right in my hands."

"Then you had better take four men in a boat and take them as you can get them. Delays are very dangerous, Ned. If you want to make a sure thing of it you had best take them as you can get them, for those you capture can be made to peach on the rest."

"Very well," replied the young detective, with a nod, as the chief sat down at his desk. "Supply me with the men, and I will lose no time, but go at once to the river and catch those men when they come back."

"That is the right talk, my boy. I like men who do not let the grass grow under their feet. The sooner we succeed in breaking up this dangerous gang the less spurious coin will be floated about the country."

He rather liked Ned Riggs for his courage, energy, perseverance and keen astuteness.

Going to the telephone, he rang up Captain G—— of the harbor police squad, and, communicating with him a few minutes, he returned to Ned and told him that a harbor patrol boat would be in waiting for him at the foot of Grand street within an hour with four river policemen in it to do his bidding.

"And if you meet with success in capturing the men you are after," said he, in conclusion, "I want you to take up the unfinished hunt of old Jim O'Hare for Bank Note Bill, as I have an idea that the detective's present trouble originated with the bank sneak."

Ned liked this proposition, as he was fond of the veteran detective, and would have been glad to avenge any injury done to the old fellow by his enemies.

He took his leave of the Inspector presently, and going down to the river, he found the police boat waiting for him between Grand and Corlears streets.

"You have you instructions from the captain, I suppose?" the detective asked of the officers.

"We were told to obey you," said one of the men.

"And you know what is expected of you?"

"No; the captain did not say anything about it."

"Well, we are to go into the sewer, and lay in wait there for some counterfeiters whom I am after."

The policemen pulled wry faces.

It would be an unsavory trip.

They had all been in the sewers before, and knew what a stench they would have to suffer.

But their duty was mapped out for them, and there was no demurring over it.

So Ned took his seat in the stern sheets, and the officers gave away with the oars to pull for the sewer vent, and thus creep along under the city.

It was the East Houston street sewer.

They were in narrow quarters when they got inside, and might have proceeded straight in, when they heard the faint clicking of oars coming toward them.

The policemen rested on their oars.

"Some one is coming!" exclaimed Ned.

"What shall we do?" asked a policeman.

"In here we would have a sorry show."

"Then let's get out on the river again."

"All right—give away."

The boat shot out of the sewer on the river once more, and flashed around the spiles of the dock under which the sewage was emptied into the stream.

There they drew up in the shadow of the spiles and waited and listened for the coming boat.

The river was excessively dark, and it will be remembered that a rainstorm was going on, and the hour was between three and four o'clock in the morning.

Within a few moments they saw the dim and shadowy outlines of a skiff come out of the sewer.

It contained a solitary occupant.

The man's features were not visible, but they saw him pull out on the stream a dozen yards, and then come to a sudden pause.

He did not move for an instant, but seemed to be watching the bulkhead.

Then he drew in his oars and seemed to be calculating the distance he was from the spiles.

A moment afterward he arose, stooped over and lifted something in his arms from the boat.

The detective's suspicions were aroused.

"He is going to throw something into the river," said he to the officers. "Look! Who has got a lantern?"

"Here is one already lit," said an officer.

He handed it to Ned.

The young detective suddenly unmasked the bull's-eye, and flashed the glaring light upon the man in the other boat, deluging him with light.

At the same juncture the man flung the object he held into the river, where it struck with a splash and instantly sunk out of sight.

But not before Ned had seen what it was.

"An iron-bound keg!" he exclaimed; "and by heavens! the man is Sam Bull!"

It was a fact.

The hunchback had returned home, hidden all trace of his crime, and had come out to put the strange key where no one could steal it from him.

He uttered a startled cry as the light fell upon him.

"Discovered!" he gasped.

Then he took fright, dropped down in his seat, grasped the oars and rowed into the sewer again.

The policemen were amazed.

But the detective was more so.

"What is the meaning of this peculiar work?" thought Ned.

He stared blankly at the spot where the keg had vanished, and then at the sewer vent.

Ignorant as he was of what transpired, of course he did not understand the meaning of Sam's actions.

"Who is he?" asked one of the policemen.

"Why," involuntarily said Ned, "he is the uncle of one of the most beautiful and sweetest dispositioned girls in New York—a girl whom I love—whom I adore—whom I am engaged to marry—and she lives with him now."

"Mighty queer, his actions," said a policeman significantly.

"You are right. Where did he come from? Let us see. Follow him. Who knows, boys, but that he may be in league with those counterfeiters we are after? And if he is, in spite of the relationship he bears to the girl I love, I shall not let sentiment interfere with my duty. Row after him, and if we can find out anything wrong about him, bless me if I don't arrest him!"

And as Ned spoke the police boat darted away after Sam Bull.

CHAPTER V.

FOUR PRISONERS.

To pursue the hunchback in that intense gloom was a matter of extreme difficulty, but the policemen went on through the sewer, guided solely by the sounds his boat made.

They came to a branching conduit, and as they reached the juncture, they heard voices coming from around the bend, which brought them to a pause.

"Look out!" Ned heard Sam Bull say in low, warning tones. "Great powers! don't go out! There is danger ahead. Ay, ay, great danger. A police boat, I'm sure."

"Comin' in der sewer?" asked a gruff voice.

"Probably" replied Bull. "Go back to Allen street. If you meet 'em, they'll catch you. No telling. Ay, ay, now, but I just escaped them. Have you got anything in the boat?"

"There's four on us."

"But I mean of the stuff?"

"A boat load."

"Ha! This is a lucky meeting, then. Keep it."

"But it's got to go before daylight for ther West."

"Then wait. Ay, ay! Wait. Later on. Come back."

"Orright. Lead ther way."

The two boats went on in the gloom, and a chill shot through the young detective like a knife.

He was cast in a fever of doubt and fear.

"Good Heaven!" he thought in dismay, "can it be possible that Sam Bull is in league with the counterfeiters. No. I do not believe it. He has always been so polite and pleasant to me when I called to see Grace. He seems to be such a gentleman. He was as courteous as a prince, and spoke always in such glowing, fervent terms of honesty and uprightness. I always liked him despite his deformed body and his ugly face. Yet this strange conversation."

"Well?" said a policeman, interrupting the current of his thoughts.

Ned started and came to a realization of his present condition.

"Well—what?" he muttered, absent mindedly.

"What is to be done? They are rowing away."

"Yes. I hear them. We must follow, of course."

"Give away then, boys."

The oars dipped down in the sluggish, filthy stream, and the noxious gases and vile stench almost strangled them.

But they kept on in pursuit of the other boat.

Presently Ned heard Sam Bull say:

"There you are home now. I will go ahead, boys."

"Where hev yer been?" asked the gruff speaker.

"Out on the river. Come around to the house this week."

"I will. So long, Sam."

A lantern was gleaming at one side of the sewer, and beside it was a small brick tunnel at which one boat paused, while that in which Sam Bull sat went on.

The light was just adequate to show the officers that the men fastened the painter of their craft to a ring-bolt, and they took the lantern from a hook, and disembarked in the little tunnel.

Then they vanished from view.

"And they have not touched any of their cargo," said Ned, as his boat started ahead once more. "This is Allen street. Then it must be the house I was shadowing to-night. Good! Let them go in. We can see what they have got in their boat now, and if it is spurious money, why we can capture them with the evidence of guilt in their possession. That means sure conviction for them. Come—we will see."

They reached the other boat presently, and seeing no signs of their enemies, they ranged alongside of it, and the light of the bull's-eye lantern was turned upon the contents of the other skiff by Ned.

It comprised several boxes, marked for transportation.

"Full of plates or money," commented Ned. "There are six."

"Hadn't we better take them while we have got the chance?" an officer asked.

"No. It would arouse their suspicions when they come back, and they might manage to get away from us after all."

"That is so."

"I am going in that tunnel."

"What for?"

"To verify my suspicions."

"As to the house it leads to?"

"Yes. I was in the same house, I think, to-night."

"What do you want us to do in the meantime?"

"Remain here till I return."

"But suppose the four men come back?"

"You can be ready to fight them, can't you?"

"Of course. If you are not back in an hour, I'll go after you."

"I may come to grief, but I doubt it."

The skiff was drawn up to the aperture in the wall, and Ned got out and walked into the passage in a stooping posture.

The policemen remained in their boat beside the opening.

The passage Ned was traversing led him into a cellar, as he imagined it would, and a lantern standing upon a barrel at one side showed him that it was the same cellar under the Allen street house he had explored before.

It proved his surmises to be true in all respects.

"I was not wrong in my calculations!" he muttered.

He was just about to advance a step further into the cellar, when he saw that two men were sitting on boxes at the opposite side of the barrel engaged in a game of cards.

The other two were nowhere to be seen.

Thinking they had gone up-stairs, the detective stood where he was an instant imagining that he was free from observation.

But just then a hand shot out from behind the wall at his side, and suddenly clutched him by the throat.

He uttered an exclamation of alarm, and the two men who were playing cards suddenly sprung to their feet.

An instant later the detective was jerked into the cellar upon his knees, when he saw the two missing counterfeiters standing over him, one of them clutching him by the throat.

"I heard yer!" chuckled the man, who was a big, rough-looking fellow. "I heard yer a comin' through the passage, and goldurn me, ef I hain't got yer fast, too!"

(This story to be continued in our next issue.)

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